STREET & SMITH'S

MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

MAY · 1941

10¢

UNUSUAL DETECTIVE STORIES

THE MURDER MAKER

A chilling mystery novel
by CLIFFORD GOODRICH

•

Also novelettes by
MARK HARPER • ROBERT C. BLACKMON
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STREET & SMITH'S

MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

UNUSUAL DETECTIVE STORIES

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A man who was both a genius and a fiend injected feeble little rabbits with a fluid that made them snarl and fight—but he craved human beings for his devilish laboratory experiments—and got them!

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Notes about our stories, authors and plans for the future.

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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BEHIND THE CURTAIN

The war today is far different from any other war that was ever fought. Wars, it seems, are no longer a matter of marching men; of huge guns firing at certain other huge guns; of clever maneuvers, and such things. Wars have become a matter of new and better weapons; swifter weapons; and more ruthlessness than mankind has ever before imagined! Wars are no longer fought by armies alone; the entire civilian population is part of the battle force, including women and children, whether they like it or not. Indiscriminate bombings; the force of starvation, sickness, and other things, are all-important in the eyes of modern war generals.

One thing this war has not yet revealed—at least, not at the time of this writing—is any really "secret" weapon. In the last war, gas and flame were two new devices of war, more terrible than any previous weapon brought forth by man. Especially gas, which has such dire after-effects in many cases.

Science has discussed many possible "secret weapons" that might make their appearance in this war. Why don't they? Are the nations afraid to start the use of anything really terrible for fear that the enemy will have something just as bad, if not worse? That's one question we hope never will be answered; whatever the reason, let us hope that they never do go to the use of anything worse than is known at present; anything, we might say, as terrible as written about in "The Murder Maker," the complete novel in this issue, in which such a new weapon is described.

You will like this story, because it has plenty of suspense and excitement in it; and because, actually, scientists have more than toyed with the idea used in this tale. It's something that may very easily happen in these days of amazing things done by science and war!

Americans are becoming really conscious of their country now, all because of the dangers which face us from across the ocean. One point about this is to make us all more interested in various parts of our land, and the historical associations connected with it. Of all

sections of this country, the Hudson River is probably the one that is most filled with historical events—and possibilities. Not only in real history, but in American fiction, it has played an important part. On page 72 of this issue, William Bogart has written a fine novelette, "The Devil's Inn," with this background. Bogart has spent many years living in this section, and knows the people and their backgrounds. He has picked up many an unrecorded story from some old native, and it is these little stories that give him a basis for the good yarns he has done on this section. Some of these have appeared previously in this magazine; this one is better than any of them.

We have a really good novel coming to you in our next issue. It is by Steve Fisher, who has written many things for us before, and who, in "Three Faces of Death," writes the best story he has done so far—and that includes all his work for the movies and everything else! It's a mystery yarn of the Bayou country, where Fisher spent a number of weeks in getting atmosphere and little bits of information on his last trip from Hollywood to New York. He came in with countless stories of that part of the land, and was so enthused over its possibilities for a book that we took advantage of his enthusiasm and told him to do us a novel on it. He did; and it's good. You won't want to miss it, so be sure you get our next issue.

All of our readers will be interested in Fisher's newest book, "I Wake Up Screaming," published by Dodd, Mead, and now one of the most popular mystery books on the market. The book was published in February, so we haven't any figures on its sale to report, but the reviews of the story, taken from the early proofs, were all so enthusiastic that it is bound to be one of the better books of the year.

By the way, if you want to get something exceptional in the way of detective and mystery fiction, ask your dealer for Street & Smith's big book, the *Detective Story Annual*, now on sale at every newsstand and book shop throughout the country. In this we have gone through all the detective and mystery magazines published by us, and selected the outstanding stories, which we group in a large-sized, well-covered book that will add to the appearance of any library table or living room. The stories were selected by Frank Gruber, winner of the Mary Roberts Rinehart mystery contest, and author of "The French Key," "The Laughing Fox," "The Talking Clock," and other best-selling mysteries, so you know they must be good.

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We've got a number of good yarns in this issue, all set for your enjoyment. Robert Blackmon gives us his Doc Trouble hero again in "The Balmy Batchelor." The story is almost as crazy as the title, for Doc Trouble gets into more trouble this trip than he has at any time previously.

Mark Harper gives us another of his Cass Manning yarns. Always

Continued on page 114

Read How These Men Got Better Jobs

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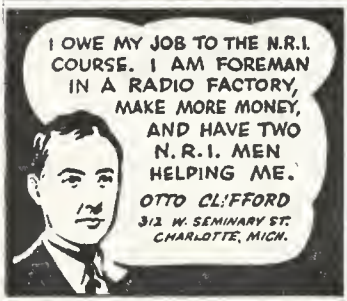
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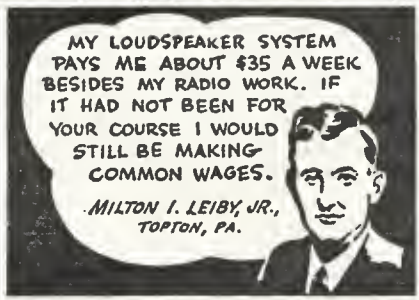
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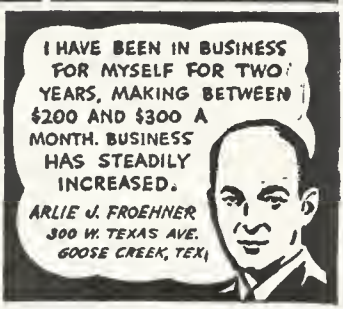
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THE MURDER MAKER

by JACK STORM

In that weird blue-steel laboratory, feeble little rabbits were injected with a fluid that made them snarl and fight. Then a man who was both fiend and genius wanted human beings for his diabolical experiments—and got them!

CHAPTER I.
DEATH IN THE GUTTER.

In another neighborhood, the kids might have been in bed, or at least at home, instead of playing in the street. They didn't like the idea of the taxi driver giving them the horn so much, either, and once in a while the core of an apple would splash against the fender of the car.

"Tough neighborhood," Duncan Firr remarked to his two companions. He was a retired businessman and lived in a skyscraper apartment on the other side of the bridge. "Rather odd they haven't cleaned up a section of this sort in a place the size of Brooklyn."

Dr. Loring Steele smiled. "Don't be panning Brooklyn," he said. He lived in Brooklyn himself, in the swanky Heights section. "A city of beautiful homes and churches, Brooklyn is."

Caleb Horn, the third man in the cab, dropped his stub of a cigar through the open window. "If you'd been in the chemical game as long as I have," he said, "you'd find that about every city with any get-up about it has outlying districts just like this. You can't have smelly chemical plants a block or two from Ritz hotels."

He peered through the window and spoke to the driver. "I think you take the next turn to the right," he said. "Then go along, not too fast, and I'll tell you when."

"Know the name o' the jernt, boss?" the hackie asked.

"Just go right along. I'll tell you when," Caleb Horn repeated.

He planned that he and his friends would get out after a few blocks, pay off the driver, and then walk the short distance remaining. He wasn't sure that there was to be any undue secrecy about his visit to the Losch-Renshaw chemical plant; but he couldn't be sure that there wasn't to be, either. He'd play it safe.

That Renshaw, the head of the firm, wanted his advice on some experiments having to do with the nation's preparedness program was certain. He hadn't minded taking Steele and Firr along. The three had been cronies for years, although Horn was a decade younger than either of the other two; and, in addition, Firr was the man who had introduced him to Renshaw.

Horn leaned forward toward the driver again. "Yes, this is the corner," he said, peering out into the darkness. "Turn right here."

The driver made the turn and continued along at about twenty-five miles an hour. There were less run-down tenements along this thoroughfare. There was a forest of big factory chimneys, and there were big corrugated-iron gates. Great flares that tinted the sky told that many of these plants were working night shifts. Guards in olive-drab uniforms stood grimly in front of the corrugated-iron gates. There was a smell of coke and oil, of gas fumes. A salty, brackish tang in the air and the occasional whistle of boats told of the nearness of some salt-water inlet.

Caleb Horn got another cigar going. "It's sections just like this one that'll keep the country safe," he remarked. "At least people work down here. If the country depended on these hotcha night spots, with chromium bars and blue mirrors and—"

He never finished what he had started to say. From a spot perhaps a block in front of the taxi came the single crack of a gun.

Horn craned his neck out the window. Down the street, just within the faint circle of light from a street lamp, he saw a man staggering into the gutter.

"That's odd!" Horn said. A man staggering in this section—well, there were grimy-looking Bars and Grills at intervals along the street. But a man staggering after the sound of a shot—

"Pull up to the curb here, driver!" Horn ordered.

He swung the door open and leaped out. He raced along the sidewalk, Firr and Steele at his heels.

The man who had been staggering near the street light had stopped now. He was teetering on his feet. One of his hands was cupped over his chin. He was shaking his head, as if he were dazed.

"What's the idea, Caleb?" Firr growled. "Why let just a common drunk—"

He clipped off abruptly. The supposedly drunken man had reeled back toward the street light. His arms went out and embraced the steel post. With his hand away from his chin, a dribble of blood showed on his chin and neck.

"Drunk, hell!" Caleb Horn exploded. "This man has been shot! I wonder—"

The man at the lamp-post suddenly threw back his head and emitted a roaring, "Ho! Ho! Ho!" He let go of the post for a second, and slapped his thigh, and burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"Yeah—shot!" Duncan Firr snickered. "Half shot, you mean. Just

an hysterical drunk."

Caleb Horn made no retort. Neither did Dr. Steele. The physician was peering with professional keenness into the eyes of the man against the lamp-post. The wounded man was fairly rocking with laughter. "Hee! Hee! Hee!" he shrilled. "Ho! Ho! Ho!" He brushed off the hand of Dr. Steele, who was trying to steady him. "Leggo! Stop ticklin' me! Hee! Hee! Hee!"

"Hysterical, all right," Dr. Steele conceded, finally. "But I'm not sure it's from liquor. Duncan, run back to the cab. Get me my medical kit, will you? I'll give him a hypodermic, and then maybe we can take him—"

Duncan Firr turned back toward the cab. The sound of another shot split the night. Duncan Firr halted and clapped a hand to the lobe of his ear. He took his hand away and looked at it under the light. There was blood on his hand.

Caleb Horn whirled and caught him as he reeled toward the gutter. He eased his friend down to sit on the curb. "You've just been nicked, Duncan," he said. "You'll be all right. But what the—"

Folks were beginning to appear on the dismal block now. A suspicious-eyed giant in the olive-drab livery of a factory guard ran up.

"What's goin' on here?" he demanded.

"You tell *me!*" Caleb Horn snapped back.

The kids who had been playing in the street around the corner were running up now. They had found some new excitement, something better than playing "cops and robbers." A handful of men rushed out of a dim Bar & Grill near one of the factories. A dark tenement across the street was also disgorging a stream of curious folks, mostly women.

They circled around the man clinging to the lamp-post. The man was dancing up and down now. He was laughing like a maniac. His laughter had become horrible.

One of the women ran up to him. "Joe! Why you laugh?" she asked.

The man's answer was another maniacal burst of mirth.

"You know him?" Caleb Horn asked the woman.

The woman raked Horn with suspicious black eyes. "Yeah," she said. "I know." She had a faint foreign accent. "Joe Bardini. And Joe no drink—much. Joe is insane. The blood runs from his chin, and he laughs!"

"*Ho! Ho! Ho!*" Bardini yelled. He let go of the lamp-post, hauled off and smashed his big fists against the steel column. But apparently he felt no pain. He continued to laugh. He threw himself off balance with one of his punches, reeled and fell into the gutter.

Dr. Steele had run back to the cab and now reappeared with a shiny hypodermic needle in his hand. He knelt down before his friend, Duncan Firr, who still sat on the curbstone, his dark eyes vacuous, his hat tumbled from his head, his long black hair tumbling over his forehead.

Then Duncan Firr began to laugh, his head back on his neck and his teeth bared, a horrible, croaking laugh which grew louder and louder until it burst forth into roaring "Ho! Ho! Ho's!" He got to his feet and staggered toward Caleb Horn, one hand outstretched to seize him. His long body was shaking uncontrollably and one hand was clasped over his stomach. Horn swiftly seized him by the arm.

"Duncan! For God's sake, stop laughing, Duncan!"

Duncan Firr had already started to twist loose, when the powerful

arms of Steele grasped him about the body.

"What's happened, Duncan?"

Steele spoke in low, soothing tones.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

There was no reply but the meaningless bursts of laughter. And suddenly Duncan Firr's arm whipped about and a bony fist cracked against Steele's jaw. In the street, voices were rising in a wail: "Joe is dying! Joe is dying!"

Steele hit out from the shoulder and upward. With the crack of bone on bone, Duncan Firr's explosive laughter died in a throaty gurgle. Yet even when he was laid out on the ground unconscious, his body muscles twitched nervously.

Rapidly Dr. Steele proceeded to fill the hypodermic syringe with a strong, colorless chloral sedative and jabbed the needle into Duncan Firr's arm. There was a momentary quiver and the tall, somber man then closed his glazed eyes and the twitching subsided.

"What was wrong?" gasped the astounded Caleb Horn.

The blue eyes of Dr. Steele were deadly serious as he turned his huge head toward the chemist.

"I have no idea. We'll have to find out later."

Caleb Horn probed his way through the crowd to the side of Joe Bardini, now lying in the gutter. But when he saw a middle-aged woman with tears in her eyes, holding the dirt-covered face in her arms, he realized it was too late. Joe Bardini had died in one last awful roll of laughter. White foam now flecked the corners of his mouth, and his lips were swollen.

A glance disclosed that the chin wound was minor. The blood had already coagulated. Only the dead man's eyes, wide open, and the pupils almost vanished, leaving the eyes a terrible white, gave indication of a violent death.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISAPPEARING CORPSE.

Caleb Horn moved to the outskirts of the crowd, and seeing a man with a particularly sad face, tapped him on the shoulder.

"You were a friend of Joe Bardini's?" he asked gently.

The man looked around. "Sure. Sure I was a good friend for Joe. Verra good friend." He shook his head bitterly.

"Do you know of any motive for his murder?"

"What you mean?"

"I mean do you know of anyone who would have wanted to kill Joe?"

"No one want to kill Joe!" There was indignation in the retort. "Everyone like Joe better than fine. No friend kill Joe. Nobody around *here!*"

The man looked suspiciously at Caleb Horn, took in the strange face, the good clothes. "Hey! What *you* do around here? You no live around here."

He turned, yelled to a man in coveralls. "Hey, Tony! Come over here. You, too, Rocco. Hey! Bring Patsy over here, too. We see who this fresh fella is, what he do here."

It looked like trouble, and although Caleb Horn ordinarily had little, if any, fear of trouble, he did not want any now, and was glad when he heard the siren of a prowl car. Seconds later, the car drew up, and two uniformed policemen got out. Another police cruiser glided up. In less than two minutes there were almost a dozen cops on the scene. They plowed through the crowd. The menacing Tony and Rocco and Patsy and the man who

called them over faded away fast.

Caleb Horn walked up to a man in a blue-serge suit who had been talking with the harness cops and various members of the crowd.

"You a detective, sir?" he asked in a low tone.

A pair of sharp blue eyes bored through Horn. "Well, what's on your mind? Who are you? Did you see this thing happen?"

Horn motioned the plain-clothes man to the edge of the crowd. He explained what he had seen. "I don't know how it happened," he went on. "I saw no one with a gun."

The detective gave him a hard-boiled glare. "You can come along with us. By your own statement, you were the first witness here."

Caleb Horn took out a pin-seal-leather case and plucked a card from it. "This is who I am," he said. "I was on my way to what might have been a secret conference with Mr. Renshaw, of the Losch-Renshaw chemical people. Government business. I don't believe there should be any publicity about me right now. I'll talk with you at headquarters later, if you like; or at my home."

The detective shook his head. "That card don't mean anything to me. I could carry a card saying I was an admiral in the navy. You'll have to—"

"Just a second, please," Horn cut in. "I see someone here who can identify me."

He had made out a tall, middle-aged, white-haired man on the edge of the crowd. He pointed. "Know that man in the tweeds? I imagine you do."

The detective's hard-boiled manner softened a trifle. "You know him? What's his name?"

"Berge," Horn told him. "Ferdinand Berge."

"O. K."

The detective beckoned to the white-haired man in tweeds. He was quite courteous now. "This man says he knows you, Berge," he said, as Berge came over.

Ferdinand Berge nodded and smiled. He extended his hand to Caleb Horn. "Well, I'm sort of a casual acquaintance. How are you, Mr. Horn?" And then to the detective, "I met Mr. Horn at a chemical plant where I was assigned to government duty some time ago. I also met him socially at the home of a mutual friend, Federal Judge Arnold."

"Oh, know Judge Arnold, do you, Mr. Horn?" the detective said. Respect had crept into his tone. "All right, sir. When I get through on this end of the case, I may give you a ring at your home. Glad to have met you, sir."

He walked over to the group of policemen ringing the body of Joe Bardini.

Berge whispered to Caleb Horn: "I guess I can find out more from you than from this screwy crowd here. Mind if I go along with you?"

"Glad to have you," Horn said. "I'll pick up my friends, and we'll scram. Still doing special work for the government?"

Ferdinand Berge smiled slightly. "Well—I'm not actively with the FBI any longer. But I still go on a few special cases. Talk with you about it later."

They walked over to Dr. Steele, who was kneeling beside the still-unconscious form of Duncan Firr. The hard-boiled detective had been talking with Dr. Steele. Now Berge spoke to the detective.

"These men don't want any publicity," Berge said. "And their friend here, Mr. Firr, is only injured slightly and can get as good care

from Dr. Steele at home as at a hospital. We'll be pulling along."

The detective nodded. "O. K.," he said affably. He scratched back of his ear. "Be in touch with all of you. This case looks like a screwball to me."

They took the same taxi, and the drive to Dr. Steele's brownstone house in the Heights section was a rapid one. Steele immediately had his friend, Duncan Firr, taken up and placed in a bed on the second floor. Firr was still sleeping, and his pulse was all right, and the physician left him and returned downstairs. When Firr awakened, Steele would take blood tests.

Ferdinand Berge talked with Steele and Horn; or, rather, he didn't talk much, he listened when the other two did the talking. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Caleb Horn was conscious of the fact that he and Steele had told Berge all they had seen on the shabby industrial street in Brooklyn and that Berge had told them nothing; not even the reason, if any, of his presence at the scene of the crime.

Finally, Caleb Horn asked bluntly: "And now, Mr. Berge, may I ask if there was a special reason why you were in that specific vicinity tonight? It wasn't just a coincidence, was it?"

Berge hesitated a second or two before replying: "Well—no. I was sort of trying to keep tabs on a man named Rowland. He spends a good deal of time in that district, I'm told. He doesn't seem to work, but he's a tough-guy type and bullies and dominates a great many of the men in the bars down that way. I was just wondering about him."

He switched to another subject hurriedly, and a moment or two later politely reached for his hat and coat. "I have a little business to attend to," he said. "I think I'll be shoving off. Glad to have had a chance to talk with you."

He shook hands with Horn and Dr. Steele, and Steele saw him to the door.

Horn was standing gazing moodily into the fireplace when Steele came back into the room.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Horn asked abruptly.

Steele furrowed his forehead. "Oh—I don't know. I can't say I go for him too much. There's something—oh, sort of insincere about him, seems to me. Must be O. K., though, if he's been a government man."

"He'd be an awful exception if he wasn't right," Horn agreed. "Personally, I never knew a Federal man who wasn't—"

"Dr. Steele!"

It was the voice of the housekeeper, from the upstairs region.

"Dr. Steele!"

Again the call came. There was a shrill note of terror in it.

Steele rushed out to the foot of the stairway.

The housekeeper was halfway down the stairs now. She was standing there with her hands up to her face.

"What's the trouble, Mrs. Murphy?" Steele asked sharply.

"He's gone! Mr. Firr is gone!"

Steele ran up the stairs. "You don't mean he's—"

"He's gone—actually *gone!* I mean he's disappeared."

Dr. Steele brushed past the housekeeper. Horn was right after him, taking three steps at a time, and reached the bedroom almost on the heels of Steele.

He looked toward the bed. Duncan Firr *was* gone! There was only the impress of his body on the sheets

where he had lain. The window was wide open.

There could be no doubt about it. Duncan Firr had been kidnaped!

There was a grim look on the strong face of Dr. Loring Steele.

"I should never have left him alone," the physician said.

"The sedative couldn't have worn off?" Horn asked. "Couldn't Duncan himself have gotten up and—"

"Not that sedative." Steele shook his head emphatically. "Somebody used a ladder and got him out." He went to the window and peered down into the dark alley separating his brownstone house from the one next door.

The housekeeper came into the room, wringing her hands. Steele turned to her. "You didn't see or hear anything, Mrs. Murphy?"

"No, sir. After we got Mr. Firr settled in the room, I went downstairs to make some coffee. I thought maybe you might want your guest to have some, on a night like this. I happened to come upstairs a couple of minutes ago, and decided to look in to see how Mr. Firr was—"

"And you found this," Steele finished, motioning toward the empty bed.

He turned back to Caleb Horn.

"Damn it, we should have expected this, Caleb. The men behind this obviously didn't want Duncan's blood analyzed."

"We'll get to the police, right away," Horn said. "There's something big back of all this screwy-seeming business. I'm a personal friend of Deputy Inspector Fanning. Come on. Get your hat."

They got a cab and told the driver to step on it and get to police headquarters fast. And once at headquarters, it was only a minute or so till they were taken into the deputy commissioner's office.

Fanning, a middle-aged man with graying hair, listened to the story of the kidnaping of the unconscious Duncan Firr. If he was surprised, his gaunt face gave no sign of it.

"It ties up, all right," he said.

"What ties up?" Horn asked.

Fanning smiled tightly. "Haven't had your radio on recently, have you? You didn't hear the broadcast? Why, we have something pretty hot here. If we can't crack this case, I'm afraid we'll be in a spot. And I may have to break a couple of young cops that I know personally, and like a lot. For Joe Bardini's body was stolen also!"

"Joe Bardini's body!" Horn gasped.

"That's what I said. It was under a couple of blankets in the street, awaiting the arrival of a man from the medical examiner's office. And damned if it wasn't stolen and spirited away somewhere right under the eyes of those two young cops!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN NAMED ROWLAND.

On their way out of the deputy inspector's office, Caleb Horn and Dr. Steele ran into an elderly man with heavy horn-rimmed glasses. The elderly man was hustling along the corridor.

Caleb Horn recognized him. "Judge Arnold!" he called out.

The elderly man stopped and turned. "Hello, Caleb," he said. "Hello, Dr. Steele."

Horn saw the look of concern on the jurist's lined countenance. "In a hurry, judge? We're not holding you up?"

"Well—not exactly," Judge Arnold replied.

"Then I'd like to ask you some-

thing," Horn said. "I ran into Ferdinand Berge tonight. You'll recall that I met him at your home. This is a pretty direct question, but—is he O. K.?"

"How do you mean—O. K.?" the judge countered.

Horn explained his unusual experience of that evening. "Berge was at the scene of the crime," he added, "and came home with us, but his attitude seemed a little strange to both Dr. Steele and myself."

"Oh, Berge is all right—I guess," Arnold said slowly. "I haven't seen him for some time. We had a little quarrel—well, maybe it was hardly that; more of an argument—some time ago."

The judge's face clouded. "Ferdinand was hurt by my daughter's refusal to marry him. I felt sorry for him, for in many ways he's an excellent chap, though much too old for Angela."

"Do you know why he left the government service?" Horn asked.

"I do—as it happens. He came into quite a little money, and decided to retire. I believe he still goes on some special assignments."

"He said he was on one at present," Strong said. "Watching some fellow named—named Rowland, I believe."

"Oh, Rowland, eh?" the judge said. "Well, Rowland may bear watching. You know, this Rowland came up before me on a criminal income-tax charge. He'd absolutely falsified his reports, and the thing ran into a considerable sum. It was my duty to sentence him to the penitentiary. He's out on parole now, and I understand he's built up a terrible grudge against me, the judge who sentenced him. In fact, it's about Rowland that I'm down here now. His actions have been so threatening that I felt it would be a good thing to mention the matter to Deputy Inspector Fanning. There's been an attempt to kidnap both my daughter and myself, and I believe this Rowland may have been back of it."

The judge put out his hand. "I'll be getting along now. I want to be sure to catch Fanning before he leaves."

He passed along up the corridor, and Horn and Dr. Steele continued out to pick up their cab.

"Where to now, Caleb?" Steele asked.

Caleb Horn was thoughtful for a second or two. "This business of Bardini's body being stolen, on top of the disappearance of Duncan—it's got me thinking things."

"Well?" Dr. Steele questioned.

"Well, I mean to find out if there's a connection, or whether some of Bardini's friends just stole his body to keep it from going to the morgue to be cut up. Some of these foreigners believe that sort of thing is irreverent, you know. I think we'd best call on Mrs. Bardini."

They picked up their cab, gave the driver instructions. "And step on it!" Horn ordered.

The driver stepped on it. The cab whirled along, and within half an hour was nearing the industrial section which had been the scene of the mysterious death of Joe Bardini.

Suddenly Caleb Horn looked back through the rear window.

"Someone following us!" he said. And, a few seconds later, "No, they've turned off. Wonder if some folks want to waylay us. They could turn off on a side street, streak along a parallel avenue, and come through and cut us off. Guess we'll have to take our chances on that. Maybe I've got the wrong hunch."

But, several blocks ahead, Horn found that his original hunch had been correct. For suddenly, as if

sprung from the earth, a man appeared in the shadows ahead of the taxi. A Tommy-gun nestled in the crotch of his arm. Bullets drummed and cackled, then spattered whining in the gutter.

The hackie swerved the cab, almost leaping the curb.

The tires squealed and snarled. Almost before the car had stopped, Steele had his door open, his face grim, his right shoulder hunched forward with a gun gripped in his fist. Caleb Horn skillfully slid after him.

But after the single volley, the gunner disappeared around the corner, his footbeats drumming out on the pavement. Side by side, Dr. Steele and Caleb Horn charged down the street.

The roar of a starting motor filled the air. As they turned the corner, a long, black car was speeding like a fleeting shadow down the street. Steele and Caleb emptied their guns at it. Their shots were futile.

Also, they lost their cab. For the hackie had taken advantage of his fares' brief absence to slam the machine up the street and make a getaway. Apparently, he didn't care whether he was paid or not; he just wanted to slip away from a set-up like this.

There was no other cab to be found in this section, so Horn and Dr. Steele walked the short remaining distance.

A few yards from the spot where Bardini had died was a dingy row of flat buildings, and before one of these a morbidly-curious crowd had collected.

"Bardini's house, I guess," Horn remarked.

Followed by Dr. Steele, he passed through the crowd. The Bardinis lived on the second floor, he learned. Horn and Steele mounted the narrow staircase slowly.

A high-pitched woman's voice drifted down to them from above. "What do they do with Joe? I want my husband's body. I want he should have decent burial. Joe good man, he deserve funeral."

"It's all right, Mrs. Bardini," a heavy masculine voice cut in. "We'll find Joe."

"But where?" the woman insisted. "I want my Joe's body!"

"Oh, we'll find him somewhere. We don't know where—now."

The voices ceased when Horn knocked on the door. There was no answer immediately. Then a man's voice called, "Come in."

Caleb Horn opened the door. He saw a room furnished with old, dilapidated tables and chairs. The room was now crowded with silent workers and their wives, who stared at the two newcomers as if they were intruders.

Caleb Horn went over to the weeping woman whom he knew to be Mrs. Bardini. He spoke to her alone, but loud enough for the rest of the room to hear. All eyes were on him with a deadly seriousness.

"I've learned that the body of your husband has disappeared, Mrs. Bardini," Horn said. "Please don't think I am intruding. All I want to do is to help you, and to find out who's responsible for Joe's death. Can you tell me anyone who had threatened Joe?"

The woman shook her head and broke out into a new fit of sobbing.

A roughly dressed man came over and touched Horn on the arm. The man's face was dark with hate, and at first Horn scented plenty of trouble. But what the man said was, "I say this man Rowland is in back of it all!"

From others in the room came bit-

ter murmur of assent. "That's right! Get Rowland! Lynch him!"

Horn raised his hand. "Just a minute, men. You're not going to get anywhere by lynching. You don't really know whether Rowland is back of this or not. But if he is, he will be punished by law. Where could I find this Rowland?"

The dark-faced man shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah, that's what *we* like to find out! Rowland, he disappear!"

Horn questioned the men and learned that the man called Rowland had scuffled with Joe Bardini some few days before, when Bardini had tried to get a job in a factory up the street. Rowland had gruffly ordered Bardini to keep away from there.

Horn studied the faces of the men. Were they telling the truth? Were they trying to put the blame on a man who had disappeared in order that they would appear innocent? The men looked honest enough, but one never could tell.

Horn and Steele left the place somewhat discouraged. They had turned up nothing new, and were stymied in their search for their friend, Duncan Firr. The police, of course, were working on Firr's disappearance, but Firr might be killed before the police could crack the case.

They passed through the curious crowd and had traveled almost two blocks along the gloomy thoroughfare when suddenly Caleb Horn whirled and gripped the butt of the loaded automatic in his pocket. A skulking figure was padding along after him, and now had scuttled away into deeper shadow. Horn drew his gun and ran back a few paces.

"I've got you covered!" he called. "Come out of there!"

It was a very short, very frail figure that stepped from the shadows—a man with a gaunt face and stringy red hair.

"What are you trailing us for?" Caleb Horn demanded.

The small man spoke in a wheezing voice. "Don't get me wrong, mister. I'm not tryin' to do you any harm; in fact, I want to do you some good."

"Explain yourself," Horn said crisply.

"They call me Little Tim Raley down here," the shabby figure said. "I'm no crook; I'm not a criminal of any sort. I'm down and out, though. I'm too small, and in too bad health, to do any kind of heavy work, and I haven't the front to get an office job."

"Well, what do you want?" Horn insisted.

"Listen," Little Tim said. "I know what you're out to find. I can help you. But I'm taking a big chance. I can tell you where you'd probably find Joe Bardini's body. But I gotta have twenty bucks—and I gotta have it right now."

Horn peered closely at the little man. The fellow looked honest enough. He might be worth taking a chance on.

Horn took a five-dollar bill from his pocket. "Here's five. If what you tell me sounds convincing, I'll take a chance on giving you the other fifteen. Now, go ahead. And no lies. If you lie, I'll have you run in. If you help me out, you'll end up with a lot more than twenty dollars in the long run."

"O. K., boss." The shabby little man moved closer, lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "Back in the Prohibition days they had cellars connected by tunnels down here at 521. They had the stills there. I got an awful hunch that this is the

only place they could have got Joe's body to in a hurry—down in those cellars. It's better'n a two-to-one chance. And I know the cops ain't wise to that place."

Horn passed a ten-dollar bill and a five to Little Tim, and then conferred with Dr. Steele. Against Steele's wishes, Horn insisted on going alone. Getting into 521 might be quite a job for one man; for two it would be more difficult.

The house numbered 521 seemed quiet and almost deserted. A light burned in a couple of the upper windows. The rest of the windows were dark, and a "For Rent" sign showed that the ground floor was vacant.

The front door was locked, but Caleb Horn decided to ring one of the bells of an upper-floor tenant and take a chance that the tenant would be too lazy to investigate.

He pushed one of the bell buttons and was gratified to hear a clicking at the door. Rapidly, he shoved the door open and glided into the dim hallway. There was no sound on the stairs as he listened. Possibly the person who pressed the buzzer upstairs figured that some other tenant had made a mistake and rung the wrong bell.

The door from the ground-floor hallway to the cellar stairway was also locked, but Horn negotiated this all right with the big blade of his knife. Cautiously, he descended the rickety stairway.

It was pitch-dark in the cellar, but by lighting a match he made his way into a big binlike room, found a light bulb dangling on a wire from the ceiling, and snapped it on. The illumination was dim, but at least Caleb Horn could see by it.

He looked back of a big pile of wood and back of some piled timbers, found nothing. Then he noticed a tall closet in the corner of the big binlike room. The door of the closet was locked, but Horn brought his knife into play again, and opened it.

And facing him, with colorless, staring eyes, was the body of Joe Bardini!

Caleb Horn moved into the closet and with both arms started to lift the sagging body out. In back of him the floor creaked. In a split second Horn had whirled and, charging low, hurled himself at the big body that loomed above him with arm upraised.

A blow descended on the back of his neck, but at the same time he felt the stomach of the man before him give way. Horn swung from the ground with his right fist. He connected, and the man gave ground, his ugly, heavy face rocking dazedly.

Horn wheeled intuitively with the sense that there was someone behind him. As he did so, his face was raked with hard knuckles. Blood rose to the top of his broken skin.

Blind fury pounded through his veins, and he threw all caution aside. Both fists swinging, he beat furiously at this new antagonist, not caring whether the blows at his face hit him or not.

Then suddenly he started to sprint to the door with the man behind him. Abruptly he stopped short and hunching his back over parallel to the floor, he spread his legs wide. Vainly the man in back of him tried to stop. But he shot over Horn's head and cracked into the wall.

Horn straightened up, and started to twist out of the way of what might be back of him. But too late. A hard, unyielding object crashed against his skull. He could feel his fist still launching out and hitting

Horn wheeled intuitively with the sense that there was someone behind him—and swung both fists furiously at his new antagonist!

something, but he could not see.

He staggered, stumbled, fell dizzily, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

In a blue-steel laboratory, the blinding, brilliant light fell from the ceiling above on the chromium table where two chemists in white aprons were carefully measuring out acids in graduates.

In the corner of the room, a dozen rabbits and guinea pigs were lying dead in a large cage splashed with their blood. Rows of smaller steel-barred cages lined the walls. Guinea pigs and rabbits crawled and hopped about in them.

A faint roar, somewhere beyond the steel doors, penetrated through the laboratory. Above it, a hard metallic voice suddenly echoed through the long, vaulted room.

"Two of each!" the speaker commanded. "That should be enough this time. Then you will make your injections."

The two chemists did not look up,

but carefully measured out some grains of white powder on delicately balanced scales. The voice had not issued from anyone in the room, but from the mechanism of a loud-speaker built into one of the walls.

The chemists had obviously achieved the correct mixture as dictated by the voice. With their stained hands they carefully filled their hypodermic syringe. Neither spoke to the other. The experiment had been undergone numerous times before.

As they opened one of the cages and drew forth two rabbits, a heavily built man with thickly corded neck muscles and thick, brutal lips entered through one of the steel doors.

The big man did not speak, but turned immediately to the location of the loud-speaker. Watching the rabbits as they were injected, he began speaking through a small microphone. Apparently he was repeating to the voice the exact results of the experiment. His voice could not be heard.

The rabbits were injected. They began hopping about more rapidly, with odd, jerky springs. Long, strange, squealing noises poured out of their throats. Rabbits seldom utter a sound.

Suddenly the black-eared rabbit stood still on its haunches. But its body was not still. Its body was quivering like a jelly. It seemed to be doing a sort of shimmy. A thin scream pierced the air, and then another, as the second rabbit joined in and made it a duet.

The harsh, metallic voice cracked out.

"That won't do! We are putting in additional time, with no additional results. What's the trouble? Speak, X24!"

The heavy man went again to the microphone, his voice inaudible as he answered. The rabbits now were emitting only small, squeaking noises. One of them turned over and went to sleep. But it was not breathing.

The loud-speaker cracked out again.

"Listen, X24. I shall give you instructions in private. Cease experiments!"

The chemists ceased working, like soldiers abruptly commanded to halt.

At a military shout of command,

they left the laboratory, passing through a door that slid open as they approached it and slid shut as they passed through.

When they had gone, the voice cracked out again.

"X24! The experiments with these low animals have not been satisfactory."

"That is so," the heavy-bodied man conceded. "But the man shot on the street, the man called Joe Bardini, proved that the experiment could be—"

"Also not completely satisfactory!" the crackling voice cut in. "We must have several human beings! And we can no longer take chances here, with experiments of that nature. Bring the human beings at dawn—to Plant No. 2! That is all!"

CHAPTER IV.

X24'S OTHER NAME.

Caleb Horn awakened to find himself lying on a dank cement floor. He tried to shift to his side and managed to do so slightly, although he was bound hand and foot. Through the sliver of light that leaked in through a crack in a nearby door, he could see that he was still in a cellar; probably the same cellar, though obviously a different section of it.

Beside him he heard a voice: "Hee! Hee! Hee!"

Horn shifted position again. He spoke softly. "Is that you, Duncan?"

There was another snicker of laughter, and Horn could tell that it was Duncan Firr, but he could take no further risks of trying to talk with his friend, for now he heard faint voices from somewhere above him. They seemed to be coming closer, and shortly he could hear what they were saying.

"Yeah, we'll snatch this Dr. Steele, too. We gotta put the silencer on him. He knows where this Horn guy went. We can't afford to have Steele prowlin' around."

"O. K., I'll leave him to you," a heavy voice answered. "I'll get hold o' Judge Arnold and that little girl o' his. That'll even up the score for both of us, huh?"

The voices ceased as footsteps sounded outside the cellar door. Horn pretended that he was still unconscious, but through the thin slits of his eyes he watched a heavy, burly man enter with a smaller, suave-looking man following at his heels. Listening, Horn heard them laughing over what had become of the red-headed man who had tipped off Horn as to where Bandini's body might be hidden. The shabby red-headed man, Horn learned, had been shot while dialing a number in a telephone booth on the dark factory street. These men spoke of murder as if it might be a good joke.

They went to Duncan Firr, and the smaller man kicked him several times. Horn heard Firr grumble and groan. They were taping up his eyes. The smaller man kicked him a few more times in the ribs. It was more than Caleb Horn could stand. He opened his eyes and began cursing violently.

The smaller man responded with a kick to Horn's ribs, and then, not satisfied, kicked him harder.

The burly, thick-lipped man warned, "Hey! What you trying to do—kill 'em? The chief wants to use 'em—at Plant No. 2. Must think they're pretty important. He won't take a chance here at the Cresc—"

"Hold it!" the smaller man warned. "Better not use any names."

"Hell! Dead men can't repeat

names! And these'll soon be dead men!"

Horn was suddenly jerked around and tape bound over his eyes.

"All right, give 'em the works," came a heavy command.

Horn wondered about this, as the big man had previously warned the other about killing the prisoners. But the next instant he had a hunch what "the works" meant, in this case.

He felt a spray being used over his face, and being a chemist, knew from the smell that he was being dosed with a sleep-producing drug. But he couldn't keep from passing out.

When he awakened, he was being taken from a closed car in a countrylike stretch of land. There was a pungent, piny smell in the air.

His leg bonds were cut, and soon he found himself walking along a woodland trail with a gun poked into his back.

He heard someone scuffing along beside him, and said in a low voice, "Is that you, Duncan?"

For a moment there was no answer, and then, as if in response, a great, roaring, "Ho! Ho! Ho!" burst forth. It was the same laugh, horribly aimless, that Joe Bardini had laughed before he died with his mouth full of dust.

"If this guy Firr keeps that up, we'll have to bump him off before the boss hears it." The voice was that of the heavy man.

It suddenly occurred to Horn that they knew Duncan's name.

Duncan's laughs were jerking out now in a continuous stream, steadily and with greater volume, only pausing for further breath. Horn tried to speak to him, but to no avail.

Commands rapped out. Horn felt a rush of cold air from the ground and was pushed from behind down roughly cut stonesteps. A great door was now creaking on rusty hinges. He seemed to be moving along a chill, eerie underground passage.

What had seemed to be the murmuring of a stream was now becoming a dull, booming roar. Another door was opened, and the roar increased to the thunder of falling water.

Horn was taken through another doorway and it was in this room that he was finally stopped. Rough fingers snapped the tape off his eyes, removing some of his eyebrow. Horn swore viciously, and then looked around. Other prisoners, bums in frayed clothing and with scrubby beards on their faces, were here also. Horn's eyes halted as he looked at Duncan Firr.

The tape had also been removed from Duncan Firr's eyes. At this moment the tall, gloomy Firr seemed to have returned to normal. He was no longer laughing, but his chin jutted belligerently and his eyes were blazing with anger.

Horn spoke to him cautiously.

"Nice mess we're in, Duncan."

Duncan Firr's eyes had turned toward Horn, but there was no recognition in them, nothing but an empty blackness which focused with wrath on Horn. This was Horn's closest friend, on whose face he had never before seen such a malignant look.

"Come on! Get goin'!"

Horn was herded with the other prisoners into a long vaulted room that might have been a natural cave at one time. The roaring of the water here was thunderous, a crashing symphony of sound. Voices could scarcely be heard even when raised to a shout. Moisture dripped from the roof.

As he looked around, Horn was struck by the room's similarity to a target range. Closed metal booths with gun loopholes stood under a

row of lights at one end of a long space. In the center, above these booths, projected a cage, from which appeared the mechanism of a loud-speaker, exactly the same, had Horn known, as the one at the chemical laboratory in Brooklyn. Half a dozen circular targets were set at the other end of the space. These had the black-and-red circles of the usual bull's-eyes of a rifle range.

But it was none of this which jerked the breath from Caleb Horn. He turned to Duncan Firr to point out what he saw in the corner.

But Firr was already gazing, standing there rigidly. His head with the long, black hair was shaking slowly. There was no expression on his face.

In a corner of the room, in a large steel cage, a dozen guinea pigs were hopping about without sense of direction. From their small mouths, yelps of utter pain pierced the air. Their skins were torn to pieces and stained with blood. The spectacle seemed hideously unreal.

The huge doors were now closed. The small, dark man with sleek hair was the last to enter, pushing before him a dozen or more miserable creatures, shuffling specimens of humanity, across the wet, black earthen floor.

All the prisoners looked weak and sick, and as if they had never been fed enough. They did not seem to care where they were; a few looked about furtively, but made no sound.

Under the small man's orders, they were kicked and shoved like cattle toward a number of large cages with open doors. The steel doors clanged shut on them.

Horn quivered with horror and anger. Only the eyes of Duncan Firr were quiet as the machinery banged amidst the dull roar of the falling water, now muffled since the doors were closed.

From the steel cage set above the rifle booths, a white finger of illumination picked out the grimly suggestive targets at the other end of the room, lighted the staring eyes and the faces of the men who had already been placed in cages. A man's figure appeared in the cage above the booths.

"Are you ready, Rowland?" the small man's voice rang over the noise.

Caleb Horn looked up at the heavy man, who was now peering about the room with dark eyes, a cruel, leering smile twisting his mouth. This, then, was Rowland, Horn thought.

At that moment, the loud-speaker beside Rowland began to crackle.

"Quiet, Torey!" Rowland snapped at the small man. "It's the chief."

Caleb Horn was conscious of a distinct thrill, here in the midst of horror. He knew the other man's name now—Torey. Probably, though, it would never do him much good; getting out of this place alive would be a big order.

A metallic voice cracked out from the loud-speaker. It sounded like a record played with a harsh steel needle.

"Somewhere this thing has been out of balance, X24!" the voice clipped at Rowland. "We are not getting the total results from these bullets. The effect has been disappointing. Bring out two of your Bowery bums!"

Two stumbling, miserable derelicts had been brought from their cages and untied. They moved dumbly across the floor, goaded toward the targets under the brilliant white lights. It was plain enough that their senses were too dulled to realize

much of what was happening to them.

The speaker cracked out again.

"Poor specimens! We must have brains for these bullets! These gutter dogs have none!"

"By all hell, I'll get you brains!" Torey muttered under his breath. "There's this damned Duncan Firr and—"

Rowland was speaking through a microphone, transmitting what Torey had said.

"We'll take that up later!" cracked the loud-speaker. "First let us see what these bullets can do!"

Caleb Horn began to realize his position. The Bowery bums was about to be shot. They were to be human experiments of the special bullets, and doomed to die! Then no doubt he, Caleb Horn, and Duncan Firr, would be the next, the first real brains for destruction.

CHAPTER V.

TORTURE CHAMBER.

Horn glanced again at Duncan Firr, but the tall, solemn man was taking no interest in what was happening. His lips were moving soundlessly, and one hand constantly rubbed at his wounded ear. With Firr in that condition, escape together would virtually be impossible.

The two Bowery bums were grinning and shuffling about. They had just received a shot of liquor; that was all they cared about. Even when the loopholes opened in two rifle booths and the bright metal barrels stuck out, the victims did not recognize their plight.

Then the invisible voice of the loud-speaker rapped a command.

"Let them have it!"

Blue flame stabbed from the two rifles. The gunmen were good marksmen. The bums flinched as if they had been stung by bees. One rubbed a hand over his hip, where the red began to appear through his dirty rags. The other man was pinching his coat at the shoulder, as if plucking through the cloth for a louse.

They stood, no different from dumb animals. The rifles withdrew. There was silence in the underground room. Then the man who had been wounded in the hip suddenly turned and clapped a scrawny hand on the other man's shoulder.

"Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee!"

It was a horrible, thin giggle of laughter. But it rose quickly to a falsetto scream. The bum pulled at his clothing. He shook and danced about, as if he had suddenly consumed a pint of cheap liquor.

The other bum sat down on the floor abruptly. He bent in the middle and a hoarse, croaking laugh came from the slobbering lips. It was such a laugh as might have come from a man who had not laughed for years. It was a forced, unnatural, squawking sound.

The loud-speaker cracked like cold steel.

"Bungled again! We shall have to try the mixture once more! When these bums are dead, throw them in the vats and dissolve them! That is all now!"

The bullet victims were now writhing on the floor, screaming with a laughter that nearly tore their lungs out. Then gradually they stretched out, twisting in death convulsions.

As Caleb Horn watched with terrible fascination the final stiffening twitch of the muscles, and then turned away, he saw one of the men on the range open a low, wooden door not quite directly opposite to

There was a low moan from the human derelict, who finally sat up and opened bleary, bloodshot eyes.

the steel doors. The fellow went through, but the bolted planking remained swinging open. A dim underground passage was all that might be seen through this door. Here was a possible means of escape!

As the thick-lipped Rowland was commanding some of the men to clear away the bodies, Horn turned quietly toward Duncan Firr. Perhaps he could formulate a plan of escape with him now. But Duncan Fill had not taken his eyes away from the victims of the bullets. His face, still a mask, framed his burning, black eyes which were like those of some trapped wild animal, glaring with killer ferocity.

Horn started to edge over to Firr, but as he did so, he heard the words he had feared to hear since he had entered this dank, vaulted room.

"Put Horn and Firr in the cages!" roared Rowland. "We won't need 'em later, anyhow!" He leered down at them. "Why in the hell wasn't that done first off? Let's see what the brains do!" He roared with laughter at his intended wit.

Caleb Horn climbed to his feet. He felt weak and sick. They were to be put in the cages like the guinea pigs and the rabbits. At last he was to learn what all this weird mystery was about. But, knowing, he would die!

Duncan Firr was still sitting on the floor. "He seemed lethargic."

"Come on! Get up!" growled one man, hauling Firr by the arm.

Firr's lanky arms moved like long pistons as he suddenly arose from the floor. The man's nose was flattened by the blows. He started to fall stonily, but before he reached the ground, Firr's bony fingers had seized him about the throat, and a savage yell burst from his mouth.

The man's neck was broken as Duncan Firr hurled him aside. A second man moved in, his rod lifting rapidly from his shirt. But he was not fast enough to prevent the pistol from being jammed back with his arm and breaking his skull.

At this moment Rowland, above in the cage, was stabbing commands to his men to seize Firr. As Horn snapped his fist in a quick punch at one of the men approaching behind Firr, he could hear Rowland roaring.

"That's more like what we want!"

A thug was coming in on Firr with the swinging barrel of a rifle. With bestial snarls drooling from his lips, Firr took the blow on his shoulders and without faltering snapped the man's neck with a fierce twist of his arms. The next two who followed together without weapons were mere puppets, for suddenly they were swinging head to head in Firr's hands, until he crunched their skulls together, and cast them into the faces of those who were moving in.

Another pair of mobsters were streaking between Horn and Firr and the passageway door. Horn put his head down and began to charge. But Firr removed them with bullets from the pistol he had taken from the man he had just killed.

Horn swung around by instinct as he started for the door. Firr was coming at him, his fists swinging, his mouth uttering foul oaths. Horn tried to evade him, but the impact of Firr's full weight toppled him into the half-opened passageway.

"Duncan! It's me! It's Caleb!"

But the insane killer paid no attention, and with the lust of murder in his eyes he rolled with Horn inside the passageway. Lead whined and whistled past the door behind them and pounded the floor. It was

almost inevitable that the bullets would find their marks.

And now one of the bums made a bid for liberty in the midst of the excitement. He had been lying on the floor, apparently in a stupor, and was unmanacled. He leaped to his feet with surprising agility, made for Rowland. Possibly he had been a pugilist in his time. His fist cracked against the back of Rowland's ear. The heavy Rowland staggered from the blow.

Horn, too, saw an outside chance for freedom. He rushed over to help the belligerent bum. He leaped at Rowland, crashed a blow into his jaw. Rowland hit the floor.

He was far from out, though. "Get 'em!" he yelled at the gunmen. "Slip it to 'em!" He scrambled to his feet, got out of the way.

Blue flame stabbed from the rifles. Horn ducked instinctively and felt a bullet hum over his head. But the belligerent bum grabbed his left shoulder and staggered.

Horn, too, staggered, feigning that he had been hit. And as Rowland came toward him, he threw himself furiously at Rowland again, grappled with the heavy man. The fighting bum circled Rowland and clubbed down punches on the back of his neck.

"Don't shoot!" Rowland yelled desperately at the gunmen. He knew that he himself might be hit, in this position. "Get rid of this pair the other way. Close the door! Open the gates of the sluiceway! That will be the last of them!"

A phalanx of gunmen descended on Horn and the fighting bum. They formed a flying wedge and catapulted Horn and the flying bum across the room. Horn found himself suddenly plunged into opaque blackness. A door seemed to close behind him. There was a rushing of water somewhere along the passage, and Horn became aware that this was no more than a roughly constructed conduit.

Horn and the derelict of a man who had put up the fight with him, still locked in each other's arms, were swept off their feet as icy water filled the sluiceway nearly halfway up to the roof. Suddenly the bum relaxed in Horn's arms. He was unconscious. He seized his coat, and with his other hand gripped at the stone walls of the passageway.

He could gain no grip, and the skin on his hands was being torn and lacerated. The bum hung like a dead weight, and Horn was beginning to tire.

And then ahead of him appeared an uncertain gleam of light above the water, which at that point seemed to run off into space. Horn realized with a shiver that this was exactly what it would do. It was the opening to the passageway through which they were supposed to go to destruction.

Desperately, Horn clung to the walls, his fingers clinging briefly and then rippling over them as over a soapy washboard. But, surprisingly, his fingers made contact with a deep indentation in the wall; it was a small passageway off the sluice. The water battered at his waist and turned him slightly, but still he hung on.

Finally he managed to draw his helpless companion up to the side of the wall and out of the water completely into the small, dark passageway. The man was still unconscious.

Horn let him be for the moment, set him down on the wet stones, and went to the end of what seemed to be a small cave.

There was a low steel door built into the rocks, Horn found. He tried

the knob softly. It was locked. He felt around for his small penknife, but he had lost it. He went back to the unconscious man. Apparently both of them were trapped here. Horn rubbed his companion into consciousness.

There was a low moan from the human derelict, who finally sat up and opened bleary, bloodshot eyes.

"Wot de hell!" was the first thing he said.

He seemed pretty far gone. He coughed, and water spewed out of his mouth. Some of these bums were tough, Horn realized; they abused themselves to a degree that would kill many normal men and, perversely enough, still survived. This bum, apparently, was one of the tough-fibered ones.

"How you doing?" Horn asked him in a friendly tone.

The derelict's rheumy eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Who're *you?*"

"Don't you remember?" Horn asked him. "That fight we put up together?"

The other man nodded. "I feel lousy," he groaned. "I took in too much water. I don't like water," he added.

"What's your name?" Horn asked.

"Tucker. Gee! I wisht I had a shot o' whiskey!"

"When we get out of here," Horn promised him, "you got a full quart coming. How did you happen to be a prisoner in that place back there?"

Tucker spoke haltingly, and with great effort. He interrupted his story with giggles and guffaws. The nick of the bullet had affected him the way it had affected Duncan Firr, yet swallowing so much water had made him rather lethargic, had taken the fight out of him.

A couple of nights before, Tucker thought it was, he and several other down-and-outers had met a heavyset man in a cheap bar along the Bowery. The heavyset man had bought several rounds of drinks. Then he had promised to take them to a party uptown where there would be plenty of whiskey and good eats. Tucker had ended up in the weird torture chamber where Horn and Firr had been taken.

"Do you have any idea of just what experiments they were making in there, or why?" Horn asked.

The bum didn't. They had him doped, most of the time, he thought. He seemed to remember something, though, about a big meeting being planned somewhere."

"Where?" Horn asked.

Tucker didn't know. "At some

circle," he said finally.

"Was it Columbus Circle?" Horn persisted.

Tucker shook his head. "I wouldn't know, boss. Hey, where's dat whiskey? I could stand a few shots right now!"

Then, suddenly, Tucker lost interest in everything—even whiskey. His head sagged, his body collapsed.

Caleb Horn tried to listen to his heartbeat, felt his pulse. Tucker had no pulse. He was dead. The bullet that just nicked him had caused his death.

As Horn looked at the water still pouring through the conduit, he noted that it was lower and running with less speed. In less than a minute later, no more than a trickle of water was running down. But Horn waited to see if the water would be turned on again. It wasn't, and so he proceeded to the mouth of the sluiceway.

He halted with amazement. Down below was almost a sheer drop of earth, falling at the bottom to large and jagged rocks. If their bodies had ever shot from this hole!

Horn started down slowly. He reached the bottom and then continued through the twilight for almost half a mile without stopping. From the marshy terrain, and certain landmarks, he knew just where he was now—in the Hackensack meadows of New Jersey. He looked back grimly at the big industrial plant to the north. Smoke was coming out of several of the big chimneys.

"Everything seemingly on the up-and-up," he muttered to himself. "An industrial plant with a hellish torture chamber concealed in it!"

He walked along as fast as. he could. He had to get to the police—and he had a special job that he could only do by himself.

CHAPTER VI.

RETURN TO HELL.

Dr. Loring Steele paced the floor of his office. There was an expression of terror in his blue eyes. His face looked old and lined.

He heard the doorbell ring and ran to the door. His right hand clutched the butt of an automatic in the side pocket of his coat as he opened the front door with his other hand.

"Hiya, doctor!"

Dr. Steele stared. He had not recognized the tattered specimen before him as his friend, Caleb Horn.

"Come in! Come in!" Steele boomed. "I'd given you up for dead. Lord! This is a relief!"

He ushered his friend into his library. "I was sure I'd never see you again," he went on. "I was attacked on my way home, just managed to make a getaway. Some thugs tried to kidnap me. And I just received a phone call from Deputy Inspector Fanning that Judge Arnold and his daughter are missing, and that Ferdinand Berge, also, has not been seen in hours. There's some terrible conspiracy afoot—something I simply can't understand."

Caleb Horn nodded grimly. "I understand—partly," he said. "I have learned considerable—though there's a great deal yet to be learned."

He told of his experience at the laboratory in New Jersey.

"A great deal of the mystery begins to clear up," he said. "We know now that this man Rowland is one of the men behind it, though he may not be the actual leader. And there is a man named Torey with him."

Dr. Steele nodded. "Stephen Torey. That was one of the men sentenced by Judge Arnold at the time he sent Rowland to the penitentiary. But surely, all this com-

plicated terror can't be just the vengeance of a couple of criminals against the judge who sentenced them!"

Caleb Horn shook his head. "No. It's deeper than that—a whole lot deeper. These criminals, and the gang in with them, are obviously working on some terrible new weapon of war, in my opinion. If we are not careful, they will perfect it shortly and in all probability sell it to some foreign nation.

"Joe Bardini was hit with that mystery bullet in a section where there are dozens of factories. In one of those factories, these conspirators have their city plant. And I tell you, Steele, it must be the Crescent Chemical Works."

He told of overhearing Rowland saying, "He won't take a chance here at the Cresc—"

Horn went on: "The other fellow shut him up then, but certainly he must have meant the Crescent Chemical Works. It's right in that section where Bardini was killed. And if they've been working there, it must mean that Shattuck Moss, president of the Crescent Chemical Co., is back of Rowland and his gang. How could Rowland work there, otherwise?"

His face clouded and saddened. "It's a blow to me. I've known Shattuck Moss for years. We never can tell who's in the Fifth Column these days, I'm afraid!"

"Then we must get to the police!" Steele said. He stood up, ran toward the phone. Caleb Horn held up his hand.

"Never mind, I've already phoned Deputy Inspector Fanning. There's an army of police on the way to the Crescent plant right now. But there's something that *I* have to do—something that one man can do better than an army of police. I've got to get back to their other plant, in Jersey, and rescue Duncan."

"But the police—" Steele started.

"Let the police, or any number of men, appear in the vicinity of that Jersey plant," Horn interrupted, "and those rats'll blow the plant sky-high. I've seen the dynamite there. I've seen the wires attached to it. No, this is a one-man job, Steele!"

"But how can you—"

"If I could get out, I can get in again. I intend to become a Bowery bum—a dead one. You must give me at least an hour before notifying the police. By that time I can have reached there, gotten in, and spiked that blow-up machinery."

He drew a rough map showing his friend, Steele, the exact location of Plant No. 2 of the conspirators. "The police can storm the gate," he said. "There's only one industrial plant there, and it must be the one. Besides, Shattuck Moss has a controlling interest in that plant.

"And another thing: I don't quite understand this part myself as yet, but have Deputy Inspector Fanning throw a cordon of police about Columbus Circle. If there's any big gathering there late tonight, have the police break it up. Somehow, this mass meeting has some connection with the whole conspiracy. And now I got to get going, to become a guinea pig for the rifles of the laughing bullets!"

Caleb Horn took a cab to his own home, two large rooms of which were fitted up as an experimental laboratory.

He stripped completely, and a moment later was slipping something like a new human skin over his body. Parts of it fitted over his head and face. It was a skin of his own devising, proof against bullets and knife thrusts.

Horn's next move was to set himself before a table filled with make-up boxes. Years before, he had been such a clever amateur actor in college that a stage or screen career could have been his for the asking, but the mysteries of the chemical laboratory had proved more of a lure to Caleb Horn.

Skillfully, and with surprising speed, Horn proceeded to change his whole appearance to conform to that of the Bowery bum who now lay dead in the passageway below the Jersey meadows. Colored little transparent shells changed the hue and the shape of his eyes. Cotton stuffed into his nostrils broadened his nose, and stuffed between his upper teeth and his upper lip gave him a prominent mouth. His lower lip became more protruding, too, because it was also packed with cotton. He dished his nose, faked a stubble of beard, and with a razor blade cut himself on the left side of the face from cheekbone to jawline. Tucker had a cut like that on his face.

When, finally, he took one last look at himself in the mirror, he was unrecognizable as Caleb Horn. He was Tucker, the Bowery bum.

He had called his chauffeur, who waited outside with a closed car. Horn slipped out of the house and into the car and gave crisp directions.

"Just leave me where I tell you, Jim," he told his driver. "Don't ask any questions. And scram away from that section just as soon as I drop out of the car."

Getting into the camouflaged opening of the long passageway was easy enough. But fighting his way up through it, Horn found, was a terrible job.

It took him many minutes to get up to the passageway where he had left the dead body of Tucker, the human derelict. Then, hastily, he stripped the dead man and donned his shabby, misfit clothes.

He battled his way up through the roughly constructed conduit, grabbed at the metal of the gateway. Inside the laboratory he could hear various sounds; so it was likely that the men in there could hear him.

"Lemme in!" he yelled. "I'll cut yer hearts out! I'll feed 'em to de pigs! *I'll moyder all o' yez! Lemme at yez!*"

Horn heard voices. Then the gateway was opened, and a strong pair of arms reached down and hauled Caleb Horn up into the room with its weird light.

Horn saw that the man who held him was Rowland. Torey, his eyes bulging, stood nearby. Just beyond them, Horn saw Judge Arnold and a blond girl that he knew to be his daughter; and over in a corner of the room, seemingly in a stupor, were Duncan Firr and Ferdinand Berge. All of them were still alive.

Caleb Horn screamed and danced and laughed. He clawed at the heavy Rowland. He yelled for guns and knives. "I want to moyder ev'rybody in de woyld!" he screeched. "Hee! Hee! Hee!"

Then he reeled crazily and fell on his face. He lay very still.

Rowland and Torey were also yelling—but with a different note, a note of triumph.

"*The chief'll go wild at this!*" Rowland shouted. "That's the best case, so far. Why, he fights his way back, and wants to murder! And the bullet we used on him *just nicked him!*"

"We got it!" Torey yelled. "We got it! *We got it!*"

He danced around like a crazy man, as if he, too, had been nicked

by one of the weird laughing bullets.

"And it's working on the guinea pig, too!" he yelled. "Look at it! Look out! Look *out! It's gone mad!*"

From eyes that seemed to be closed, Caleb Horn saw a guinea pig that had escaped from one of the cages. The little rodent was snarling and slashing with its small fangs at the legs of one of the chemists. It was running amuck through the place when Rowland picked up a rifle, clubbed it by the barrel and smashed the little creature to death.

Rowland fairly chortled in fiendish glee. "It's working, all the way round, since the chief changed the formula!" he said. "We've got it at last! And that makes it just fine for our friends here! They won't be just laughing from now on, when those bullets clip 'em!"

He had turned to Judge Arnold as he spoke. The gray-haired jurist looked at him calmly.

"Whatever this may be about, I'm old and ready. But isn't there some way of sparing the life of my daughter?"

The softly insinuating voice of Rowland replied:

"If it may make your end a little more unpleasant, judge, I can assure you that there *is* a way of sparing the life of your daughter. Oh, yes! There certainly is! Your daughter is a very beautiful girl. Very much the type I admire!"

It was then that the judge lost control and broke out into curses. He was led aside. His daughter insisted on remaining close to him. Rowland walked next to her, raking her flawless figure with his bestial glance.

To the eyes of all, the Bowery bum, Tucker, had stretched himself on the floor and gone to sleep. Rhythmic snores issued from him. But now, as brilliant floodlights snapped on, Caleb Horn's eyes missed nothing, and he saw the thick-lipped Rowland on the platform by the loud-speaker above the rifle booths. As the light swerved to the bull's-eyes, a steellike voice came over the speaker.

"We are getting results. But nothing but perfection will do! We will try additional victims. Take four of those bums. Fire only at one of them!"

Four ragged men taken from cages were now cursing and scuffling. But they were weak. Their resistance was brought on only by the subconscious memory of what they had witnessed in this room of laughing bullets.

Steel wrist manacles dropped from the targets. They operated automatically on controls. The arms of the four men were snapped into place and drawn upward.

The loud-speaker was crackling another order:

"X24! Keep all your men protected back of barriers! Place the knife before these specimens. Allow one minute after the shot is fired! *Ready!*"

Blue flame lanced from a booth. A small red blotch leaped to the ragged shirt sleeve of the smallest of the manacled men. Then there came a scream, shrill, piercing, almost unearthly.

The small bum had jumped at the impact of the bullet. Now he was standing there dazed, but fighting the steel on his wrists until the skin peeled from his hands.

"Free them!" rapped out the steely speaker voice.

From slitted lids, Caleb Horn could see the shine of the knife that

had been stuck in the earthen floor in front of the targets. He watched it when the manacles fell from the wrists of the four bums.

The small, wounded man pivoted. His mouth opened, and awful roars, like those of a jungle animal, came out. He was facing his three companions—men who were bigger than he was, and unwounded. His roars became maniacal snarls, and he sprang, lashing out with his fists.

Anyone of the three bigger men should have handled the wounded man, but it was as if they were trying to beat a mad panther with their fists. One man went down with his ear torn clean from his skull.

The wounded little man seemed to have superhuman strength within that frail shell of a body. He downed a second man with ease. And it was only by means of a lucky hold that the third man finally hurled him to the floor.

It was then that the wounded man must have seen the gleaming knife.

Caleb Horn could hear Judge Arnold's shout: "Stop it! In the name of God, *stop it!*"

Nobody stopped it. The wounded man caught up the knife from the floor. One man started to run, but the bullet victim was upon him, driving the steel blade again and again into his back, even after there was no life. The other bums were fleeing, dashing madly toward the rifle booths. They yelled in panicky, jittery horror.

But the rifle booths were closed steel walls. There was no place where the terrified bums might find refuge. It was like some grisly arena from which there was no escape.

The wounded bum had never been a fighting man, judging from his appearance. He was weak-faced, soft-chinned. Before the bullet had hit him, his eyes had been watery and mild-looking. But now his skinny legs shot him across the floor. His scrawny arms flashed about. He cornered one man, and even while the other was beating at his face with fists of terror, he slit the man's body from throat to stomach and buried his hand in the bloody carcass.

CHAPTER VII.

SECRET WEAPON.

The voice came from the loudspeaker again:

"Test one against the other! Put a knife in the cage in line with the guns. Shoot the prisoner, then set him free!"

Caleb Horn let his hands slip along his ragged clothes, touching the deadly automatics that he had concealed there. He had never dreamed of such ruthless brutality. These prisoners were no more than guinea pigs. But Horn figured his time as not yet ripe. All this was at least delay. The police would be on the way now. Whether they would reach there in time, that was the question. But every passing minute brought them nearer. These poor creatures who had once been men were now at least being of value after having had a wasted life; they were delaying the torture of others. Some of them might yet be saved.

Now a knife had been tossed at the feet of bleary-eyed derelicts in a cage opposite the rifle booths. The man looked out with a silly, stupid grin on his shaggy face. His hands were gripping the steel bars loosely.

There was no report of the rifle. Only the uncanny blue flame. The bum in the cage flinched, and a red streak appeared across his cheek. Still he stood there, relaxed, apparently aware of nothing.

Then, suddenly, his hands tight-

ened on the bars. The bum howled with sudden rage. He might have been some giant chimpanzee, the way he jumped up and down in his cage.

The cage door opened by automatic control. At this moment the mad killer of three of his companions was pacing along the walls, snarls coming from his skinny throat. The man who had just been wounded came leaping out, holding high the knife that had been tossed into the cage.

The two did not approach each other warily, or circle, watching for a chance. Instead, they dashed straight at each other, knives lifting. The horror of steel ripping red flesh was all the greater because of the lack of skill of the fighters.

Neither was adept enough or lucky enough to find a vital spot. Both seemed determined only upon slicing each other's bodies.

Neither gave any evidence of pain as the knives tore through cloth and muscles. The pair became ghastly, gory objects, finally sinking to their knees through weakness, but still striking with the deadly intent of men bent solely upon extermination.

They seemed to die together. Their ripped, bloody bodies shuddered; then lay still, very still.

The voice crackled from the loudspeaker:

"Satisfactory! Finally we have attained what we set out to do! We need no more subjects, X24, except those which you wish to use as a matter of vengeance. You may summon those subjects now. Then I shall advise you as to the handling of the mass meeting tonight. We make history tonight!"

Rowland spoke into the microphone, but his words were inaudible in the steel-walled room. Then Rowland turned.

"Our next subject will be Judge Arnold!" he said.

"And I!" a girl's voice shouted. Horn knew the voice to be that of Angela Arnold, the Federal judge's daughter.

Rowland laughed loudly, a little hysterically. "No, Miss Arnold! You have another destiny in life. Judge Arnold is to be the next target, men. Ready!"

Caleb Horn's moment had arrived. The time might be premature; the police might still be many minutes away. But he had no choice.

He heard the triumphant shouts of Rowland and Torey, who hated Judge Arnold. He heard the hysterical sobbing of the judge's daughter Angela. And under cover of the mad excitement, Horn began to squirm his body toward the corner of the room. If he could get to those wires that controlled the explosives then—"

He was within a dozen feet of them when Rowland roared like a bull.

"Men! Watch that bum! Watch Tucker! He hasn't been asleep. He's faking! Get him! Get—"

Horn's hands were hidden in his rags. His fingers were set upon the comfortable curve of his automatics. He leaped to his feet. He saw a trio of gangsters charging toward him. One hand came out of his rags. One of the automatics was in it.

But before he could fire, a shot cracked out from somewhere behind him, and the foremost gangster pitched headfirst to the floor. Horn snapped a glance over his shoulder, saw Ferdinand Berge, no longer appearing drugged, but wide awake and alert, an automatic in his hand.

Blue flame lanced out from the rifles. Horn felt the pounding of bullets against his ribs. He heard

the snap of their shells breaking and they stung him. But the tight, bulletproof skin beneath his clothes remained unbroken.

Caleb Horn fired, and a second of the gunmen staggered. He dropped his gun, wilted to the floor. The third toppled from a bullet fired back of Horn—from Ferdinand Berge's automatic.

Other gunmen, though, were charging toward Horn, who took a chance, turned his back, then leaped toward the corner and grabbed the wires that controlled the explosives. He ripped at them sharply. The connections broke. Horn felt bullets pounding against his back, and they gave him extreme pain, but again the chemical skin proved perfect protection.

The sleek-haired little man, Torey, cowered in a corner, gray with terror. But his cowering did him little good. A bullet from Berge's gun caught him squarely in the chest. He managed to get to his feet, then suddenly collapsed. He lay on the floor writhing and groaning.

Rowland had run toward one of the range rifles, but Judge Arnold blocked his way, only to be hurled roughly aside and slammed to the floor. But Angela Arnold leaped at the heavy-set fiend, clung to him, clawed him, scratched at his eyes and face. She fought like an enraged panther. There seemed some sort of preternatural strength in that lissome body of hers.

Rowland succeeded in shaking her loose, but now his way to the range rifles was blocked by Judge Arnold again. Rowland was slavering with rage now. He snapped an automatic from his pocket and pulled the trigger. Judge Arnold staggered and fell. His daughter, Angela, sprang toward him, sat beside him, raised his head and pillowed it in her lap.

Now the guns of the mobsters and the weapons of Horn and Berge were banging away. Berge had circled around to cut off Rowland from the rifles, and Horn leaped forward and tangled with the burly monster. But obviously Rowland had another ace in the hole. He sprang before the microphone. As he did so, Horn was on him in one leap, tore him away from the microphone. The pair of them struggled over yards of the floor.

It was then that the shouts came from outside. Shouts—and then shots, several of them.

The burly Rowland tore away from Horn's grip and rushed over to the gate of the sluiceway. But a bullet from Berge's gun stopped him midway across. He stood stark still and swore. He had been struck in the shoulder.

Then, suddenly, other big, burly figures appeared in the room—men wearing the uniform of police, others civilian clothes. Clubs swung on skulls. Most of the gunmen yelled for mercy. But one of them aimed his automatic point-blank at Caleb Horn. Horn saw a flash almost in his face. That was all he remembered for the present.

When he opened his eyes, Dr. Steele was bending over him.

"How you doing, Caleb?" Steele asked, and his smile indicated that Horn's wound was not serious. "Take it easy, friend. You got a bullet smash that plowed across your temple. But I guess these tough muggs'll begin to realize that they can't kill you. You just don't kill."

"And Duncan?"

"Duncan'll be all right. May take weeks, though, to get that poison out of his bloodstream. It wasn't

the bullet nick that affected him, you know. A nick like that from an ordinary bullet would have been no more dangerous than any other scratch. It was the poison in the laughing bullet. The bullet just broke the skin, but poisoned him enough to go berserk, then drug him for hours, and now put him under the care of medical experts for weeks. He's on the way to the hospital in an ambulance right now."

"And Judge Arnold?"

"The judge is dead. Berge got out of it all right, though. He's consoling Angela in the inner office, and I'm not sure but that their romance will spring up again, after these tragic happenings cool off. Berge's tops in his line. He got a tip-off on this whole conspiracy, had been trying to get into the Crescent chemical plant in Brooklyn for days. But he couldn't quite figure how to do it, without exciting suspicion. Things were about ready for the blow-off when we ran into that mysterious murder of Joe Bardini."

The physician smiled. "And you'll be glad to learn that your friend, Shattuck Moss is not mixed up in this mess. Moss and some of his executives were snatched several days ago. They were held prisoner over here in Jersey, and Rowland and his men took over. The cops and Feds broke Rowland down, and made him come through with everything."

"Then who *was* back of Rowland?" Horn asked.

"Someone who'll never bother us again," Steele said. "A foreigner who called himself Fulda; for a time he was an experimental chemist at the Crescent plant. He bumped himself off in his private sanctum when the cops broke in here and he realized everything was lost. But from papers in his pockets, we got a great line on Fifth Columnists working against Uncle Sam during this preparedness drive. The formula of the laughing bullet, though, I'm afraid we'll never know."

"Well, what *was* the bullet?"

"Federal men haven't finished their investigation as yet," Steele said. "But what they've turned up already! The main drug in the bullet was a type of marahuana—*cannabus indicus*. It was, of course, mixed with others in varying quantities, one of the most important being the chemical which produces laughing gas.

"Fulda knew the grudge that Rowland and Torey and some of those others held against Judge Arnold. He was a smooth gent, Fulda, and twisted their hate to include the government they'd defrauded of heavy income taxes.

"The mass experiment was to come tonight. They'd fooled a lot of gullible folks to gather at Columbus Circle at midnight tonight. It was a phony drive to stop preparedness, claiming it would lead us into war. The laughing bullets were to be shot into the crowd. Maybe dozens of persons would have been hit. Fulda wanted to see how the thing worked in the mass. If it worked at the meeting, he knew that his government could use it against the soldiers of an opposing army—make the opposing soldiers fight and kill each other, instead of the enemy. It was a terrible, revolutionary weapon. And now that Washington knows about it, I'm betting that it will speed up the preparedness program."

Caleb Horn got to his feet. "That reminds me," he said. "What time is it? I must go down to the Losch-Renshaw plant to have that delayed conference with Mr. Renshaw!"

THE END.

Doc Trouble had faced many a queer case in his professional life, but never one as amazing as

THE BALMY BACHELOR

by ROBERT C. BLACKMON

CHAPTER I.

"I'M NOT DEAD!"

The woman had merely fainted. One inhalation of ammonia from the small bottle in his medical bag revived her, yet he raced twelve blocks through the early evening traffic to apply that disgustingly simple remedy.

The black medical bag swung vigorously from the long fingers of his left hand. Light from the nearby street light struck the yellow gold letters on the side of the bag and they seemed to wink indignantly as

he left the coupé at the curb and strode across the sidewalk to the narrow, alley-flanked brownstone which housed his medical offices and bachelor apartment. The gold letters on the bag spelled: DOUGLAS TRUE, M. D.

The police—particularly Sergeant McCann, foghorn-voiced homicide chief—called him Doc Trouble. They swore that he and trouble went together as corned beef goes with cabbage. They swore that screwball trouble followed him around, awaiting the most troublesome time to happen.

Past events seemed to prove the police correct, but there would be no trouble tonight.

He had just returned from the wild ride to administer an ammonia inhalation to the woman who fainted. Tonight, he was going to get some much-needed rest. The telephone in his consultation room had driven him out of bed at least twice each night for the past two weeks.

His tall, gray-clad figure stiffened as he mounted the stone front steps of the brownstone and opened the door of his reception room. Straight brown brows twisted indignantly over gray eyes which retained but little of their usual calmness. The telephone in his consultation room was ringing stridently. He could recognize its clamor above all other telephones in the world.

That telephone had summoned him to administer treatment to expectant mothers, croupy babies, drunks, hysterical girls and Heaven knew the rest. That telephone had sent him racing throughout the city, day and night, for the past six years, to cope with all the ills and troubles to which human flesh is heir.

He had come to almost resent its ringing.

Sighing resignedly, he went into the reception room. Sliding the medical bag onto a magazine-strewn table just inside the door, he went into the consultation room and headed for the telephone table.

"This is Dr. Douglas True."

He was frowning, but his voice was pleasantly smooth and crisply professional.

He heard the telephone operator say:

"This is your party. Deposit one nickel, please."

A bell jangled. Then a feminine voice shrilled in the handset:

"Dr. True! My husband is dying! He is lying so still and quiet! He isn't even breathing! This is Mrs. Wayne Hutton, Apartment G, 1915 Morrell Street. Hurry! My husband is having convulsions. He is unconscious and moaning with pain and begging me to get a doctor right away. He is screaming with pain. Hurry!"

The woman hung up.

True's frown deepened as he replaced the handset. The corners of his mouth went down a little.

He stood very erect and still as the name the police had given him flashed into his mind—Doc Trouble.

The shrill woman voice in the handset had held a note of hysteria. It had also held a promise of—trouble.

Patients never were unconscious, lying still and quiet, scarcely breathing, and moaned with pain and begged for a doctor at the same time. Convulsions, absence of breath, screams of pain and supplication for medical treatment never occurred simultaneously. It was a medical impossibility.

The woman could have become confused in her excitement, yet—

True sighed again, turned and went to his medical bag. He was

frowning deeply as he sent the light coupé with the Aesculapian emblem fixed to its bumper racing through the night toward 1915 Morrell Street. The address was across town, in a more or less disreputable section.

He parked the coupé at the curb before the dingy brick front of the four-story apartment building. The black medical bag swung from his left hand as he entered the building.

The tiny lobby apparently had not been swept for a week. Grit crunched beneath his polished black shoes as he headed toward the uncarpeted stairs. There was no elevator. Appartment G, according to the rusty mail boxes in the lobby, was on the third floor. The name on the G box was Wayne Hutton.

True strode along the dimly lighted third-floor hall and stopped on the thin carpet before a door with a metal G fixed to its dark panels. There was no bell button. He rapped on the door and took off his dark-gray felt hat. He was still frowning.

Fully fifteen seconds passed, then the door was jerked open suddenly, and he saw a man of about thirty years of age. The man was in his shirt sleeves, wearing an opened brown vest.

The throat of the shirt was open and the man wore no tie. The shirt and vest and trousers were badly wrinkled, as if the man had slept in them, but the man's eyes indicated that he had not slept for many hours. Veins made a red, bleary network about the dark-brown irises. A two-day beard darkened the man's broad jaws and square-tipped chin. His dark-brown hair stuck up in rumpled peaks on his head, and his lips looked dry and pinched with fatigue.

There was a heavy blued automatic in the man's right hand. The black muzzle of the weapon was centered on Douglas True's lean middle.

"Oh . . . uh . . . I thought you were someone . . . else."

The man's voice was deep and shaky with strain. He swallowed a bit noisily, and his brown shoes shifted on the thin rug of the apartment living room. He put the hand holding the gun behind his back, as if to hide the weapon. His broad, chunky shoulders jerked a little, and he tried to grin. It didn't go over so very well. The muscles about his mouth were too tight. His bloodshot eyes went to True's medical bag.

"Oh . . . uh . . . you're a doctor. I . . . uh— Well, come in."

He stepped back and opened the door wide. His grin became a little more like a grin, but his solid, chunky body was poised tensely, as if he half expected someone to come into the apartment with True.

"I was summoned," True explained crisply, "to administer medical treatment to a patient who seems to be suffering from a most disconcerting combination of maladies. Where is he?"

There was an acid sharpness in his voice. His eyes swiveled, searching for some sign of a sick man in the apartment. He saw and heard nothing to indicate that the apartment held anyone but the bleary-eyed man with the gun and himself.

The room they were in was a typical apartment living room, scantily and cheaply furnished. The overhead light was on, baring the worn spots and stains on the overstuffed living room suite, on the thin rug. A door opened in the right wall of the room, apparently into the bedroom. True could see the bed, though the lights in the bedroom were not on. The bed covers were

rumpled, but there was no one in the bed.

A small, varnished table sat under the double, curtained windows across the living room. Six paper tape-bound packages of rectangular, green paper sheets sprawled on the table top. One of the packages was broken open, the green sheets opened so True could see them clearly. The green paper sheets were bank notes. He could read the denomination of one of the bills. It was marked one hundred dollars. The packages on the table apparently contained many thousands of dollars.

True's mouth felt much drier than usual. The name the police had given him flashed again into his mind—Doc Trouble.

"I received the telephone call a few minutes ago," he said precisely. "The caller was a woman. She gave her name as Mrs. Wayne Hutton. She gave the patient's name as Mr. Wayne Hutton, her husband. She informed me that Mr. Wayne Hutton was either dead, or dying."

"Uh . . . uh . . . well, now, doc"—the bleary-eyed man's grin seemed to have frozen on his unshaven face—"there's got to be some sort of mistake somewhere. Nobody's called from here. Nobody's used that telephone." He ducked his head toward the wall behind True.

True's eyes followed the movement, and he saw the wall telephone to the right of the hall door. His mouth straightened and he became a little more erect.

The woman who claimed to be Mrs. Wayne Hutton had called him from a pay telephone. The instrument on the wall of the apartment living room was most certainly not a pay telephone.

"You . . . uh . . . got the name and the address right, doc." The man with the gun shifted nervously. His bleary eyes seemed to be trying to see all around him at the same time. His ears seemed to strain, listening for every sound. "But something's wrong. Somebody's kidding you. Mr. Wayne Hutton isn't feeling so hot, after twenty-two hours straight of cutthroat gambling."

He motioned toward the money-laden table with the gun.

"Outside of that, and sort of needing a shave, something to eat and a lot of sleep, Mr. Wayne Hutton is getting along O. K., I guess." He rubbed at his bristly jaw with his left hand. "You see, doc, *I'm* Mr. Wayne Hutton. And there isn't any Mrs. Wayne Hutton. There can't be, because I'm not married. I'm a bachelor. You can see I'm not sick, and I'm not dying, and I'm not dead!!"

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE!

Douglas True, M. D., stood very still. He could feel the skin of his face tightenng. The name the police had given him was clamoring in his ears—Doc Trouble.

Douglas True, M. D., had apparently attracted trouble again tonight, in the form of a bachelor's wife and a dying patient who wasn't even ill!

"I'm sorry, doc." Hutton's humor was heavy and strained. His eyes were hard and cold and watchful. The gun hanging at his side seemed poised, ready for something which he expected to happen. "I'm sorry you don't get to try out your pills on Wayne Hutton tonight. I . . . I guess it's just a sort of a mistake. There's nobody here but me, and I don't need a—"

"Wayne!"

The high, shrill woman voice

jerked True around to the right. The voice was the one he had heard over his telephone less than thirty minutes ago.

He saw a young woman standing in the open doorway of the bedroom to his right, not ten feet away. Hardly more than a child, she had smooth blond hair that cascaded down to turn under curls about her shoulders. There were a few little curls on the top of her head, and these were tied together with a pale-blue silk ribbon. It gave the girl a very little-girl look. She wore a long, frothy evening dress of light blue, and tiny blue slippers peeked out from under the floor-touching hem of the dress. Her arms and shoulders were bare, smoothly white beneath the overhead light. White teeth glinted between her parted red lips. Her large blue eyes were very bright in her small pale face.

"Wayne," she said again, shrilly. "He did come! I'm so glad he got here. I was afraid that—"

"Adele!" Hutton choked out the word. His bleary eyes held astonishment as he stared at the girl in the doorway. "How did you—"

"We haven't time for that now." The girl seemed to float into the room. Her eyes went to True. "I'm ever so much obliged to you for coming, Dr. True. You don't know how much it means. Anything could have happened. Here!"

She floated to the money-laden table and took a bill from the broken package. Then she was beside True.

"It's worth it, Wayne," she shrilled over her shoulder, then thrust the bill into True's right hand. He had to hold it, or drop it and his hat. "That should take care of your fee. I'd explain everything now, but Wayne and I . . . haven't time. We— They'll be here any minute. We've got to get away before they come. Hurry, Wayne. Get ready to leave, right away. Thank you just heaps, Dr. True, and if I'm ever sick, I'll surely call you."

She caught True's arms and urged him toward the apartment door.

"You've got to leave quickly," she chattered as they neared the door. "I . . . I don't want you here when they . . . come. I . . . I had to lie about Wayne being sick and about— But hurry!"

She reached for the doorknob.

The door slammed open violently. Swinging, it struck the girl and knocked her halfway across the room and she stumbled to her knees. True heard her scream a little, then the door hit his left shoulder and drove him to the right with so much force that he all but fell.

Adele screamed again. The gun in Wayne Hutton's hand jumped up and spat flame and smoke. The sound of its explosion was all but deafening in the room. It made True's teeth bang together. It was all very confusing.

He saw three men crowd in through the doorway, pushing the door open farther. The door practically screened him from the three men. One of the three men was very small and thin. He was coughing and wheezing. The other two men were much larger and heavier. All three wore dark clothing and hats. All three held guns. It seemed that the three guns started roaring at the same instant, and the apartment rocked with the explosions.

Instinctively, True closed his eyes. He felt as if the air of the room was filled with bullets. He heard someone make a weird, gobbling sound and opened his eyes. One of the heavier men dropped his gun. His big legs bent beneath his weight and he fell forward, sliding

along the thin rug on his face. He rolled over a little and True saw a small, purplish hole in the center of his dark forehead. Thick, dark blood with little lumps in it oozed out of the hole. True shuddered.

Adele was screaming again, but he could understand nothing the girl said. He saw her scramble to her feet and run to the money-laden table near the windows. Scooping up the packages of money in her hands, she ran across the living room to the open doorway of the bedroom. Then True caught a few words as she screamed again:

"—got the money, Wayne! Run! I—"

Then the girl was gone, disappearing into the bedroom.

Wayne Hutton was crouched slightly. His bleary eyes were all but closed. His brown hair seemed to stand up higher and wilder on his head. The gun in his right fist was blasting again and again. He made one step toward the bedroom door, as if to follow the girl. Then he stopped suddenly. His stocky legs wavered beneath him. His body jerked, as if something had hit it. His head sagged down until the chin touched the front of his soiled shirt. The gun slid out of his hand and bounced on the floor. He sighed deeply, and fell, crumpling into a still heap on the rug, almost in the center of the room.

True saw the small, wheezing man and his larger companion move toward Hutton. Their eyes were blazing, and the lips of both men were drawn back from their teeth. The larger man said harshly:

"The louse got Jake, Manny!"

The smaller man coughed again in the cordite-laden air and said chokingly:

"I got . . . *him* . . . Joe! That shill copped the dough and lammed. We got to—"

Then Manny saw True.

"Hey!"

The gun in his bony right fist jumped up, the muzzle seeking True's chest. Above the gun, his thin, sharp face was pale, little black eyes blazing wildly from it. True could see his small, sharp teeth between thin, bloodless lips.

True acted instinctively. A split second, he realized, was between him and death. Manny's gun would blast. He lashed out with the medical bag in his left hand, aiming it for the gun in Manny's hand. As he swung, he hoped that none of the glass instruments in the bag would break. The new compact sphygmomanometer—"

The swinging bag struck Manny's gun and knocked it aside as the weapon blasted. Glass smashed somewhere behind True. He stepped forward and tried to drive his right fist into Manny's thin face. He half regretted the necessity of striking the smaller man, for Manny was ill. His wheezing, choking breath indicated a severe asthmatic condition.

Before True's knuckles reached Manny's face, the big man whom Manny had called Joe swung his fisted gun and hit True on the side of the head. The impact of the blow made True bite his tongue, and he forgot all about hitting Manny. He forgot almost everything but the name the police had given him—Doc Trouble.

Pain shot throughout his body, seeming to find its source in the point of contact of the big man's swinging weapon. True could almost feel his eyes crossing. He could feel strength draining from him with startling rapidity. His long legs

folded beneath him. He heard his medical bag strike the floor. His knees hit with a jar that seemed to tear his head off. Then he was lying on his face. Dust from the worn rug was in his nostrils and he wanted to sneeze, but couldn't.

He could do nothing but lie motionless, entirely helpless. Blood made a warm stream over his forehead and left temple.

"Don't shoot him, Manny!" That would be the larger man's harsh voice. "I got him. We got to get out of here, fast. The shots'll bring cops. The dame's got the dough. We got to get her. Grab Jake's legs. We can't leave him lying here. Come on!"

True heard the two men grunting. The smaller man's asthmatic cough and wheezing was very loud. Then it was gone. Feet clattered in the hallway, fading quickly.

A little breath came from between True's teeth. It was a small sigh of relief. There were no more bullets in the air. The trouble, apparently, was past.

He winced at even thinking of the word "trouble!"

CHAPTER III.

ADELE!

Douglas True, M. D., remained very still on the floor of the Hutton living room for minutes. Consciousness came and went at irregular intervals, bringing with it a throbbing that threatened to burst his skull into millions of fragments.

He became aware of a thin wailing sound that grew steadily louder, and wondered dully if the sound was in his head, mingled with other roaring sounds. Then he knew that the sound was the squawling of a police siren. Someone had heard the firing and had called the police. Someone usually did.

True sighed and forced himself into motion.

Slowly, he made it up to his hands and knees. The floor rocked beneath him and he was forced to brace himself to keep from falling. The sirens stopped.

Heavy feet clattered in the hallway as he pushed himself into a kneeling position. He was still to one side of the door, the open door all but screening him. Hutton was huddled in the center of the room, very still.

Two uniformed police officers burst in through the open apartment door, guns in their hands, and ran toward Hutton. A third man, whose ponderous square hulk was clad in a wrinkled blue serge suit, pounded in after the uniformed men. The third man was Sergeant McCann, the homicide chief. The sergeant's bristly jaws clamped grimly, and he glared at True over the barrel of his Police Positive.

"Don't move!" His foghorn bellow shook the floor. "I'll blast the— Aw, hell! It's him—Doc Trouble!"

The sergeant all but threw his gun away in disgust. He stamped to True, helped him to his feet and stood, glaring at him with little blue eyes that fairly scorched True's skin.

"What," growled McCann, "are *you* doing here, Doc Trouble? How come you can't stay home like a right guy and quit messing in things I got anything to do with? How come you got to go around dumping screwy messes in my lap all the time? By golly, if I knew you was going to be here, I'd have walked home instead of riding this far with Mac and Pete. I don't want no part of you. I— All right. All right. Ain't you got a tongue? What hap-

pened? Make it good and screwy."

McCann's big voice was lead heavy with sarcasm.

Mac and Pete were bending over Wayne Hutton.

"He'll live, sergeant," one called over his shoulder. "He got it twice, high up in the left shoulder, missing the lung. Mac, call in for the wagon and make it snappy. No stiff yet, sergeant, so that lets you out."

Pete got to his feet, grinning, and crossed the floor to stand beside McCann. Mac went to the telephone.

"I'll bet," the sergeant growled sourly, scowling at True, "it'll rain stiffs in a minute! Anything this guy has anything to do with winds up with stiffs and a screwy mess dumped in my lap. All right, Doc Trouble, let's have it. Brass monkeys, tigers, twisted tongues. You had all that. Maybe this time it was a red-striped hyena bit a stiff's head off and then run off with the body, huh?"

McCann rubbed at his briskly jaw with the barrel of the Police Positive.

"The cadaver you so ardently desire, Sergeant McCann, was here until a few moments before your arrival."

True clung to the door edge to keep from falling. His head was roaring. Despite that, his mouth corners twitched a little. There was a hint of a twinkle in his eyes. McCann always affected him like that.

"And permit me to again remind you, Sergeant McCann, that my name is—"

"Yeah! Trouble!" McCann's bellow shook the walls. "Screwy trouble! What about the stiff? What cooled him?"

"The gentleman in question had the extreme misfortune to receive the projectile from a pistol in the center of his forehead. I should venture the opinion that the leaden missile pierced the frontal section of the cranium and lodged in the brain, producing almost instant death."

The twinkle became brighter in True's eyes. He felt much better.

"As to my presence at the scene of so much . . . ah . . . trouble"—he winced at the word—"I was summoned here by a young woman who claimed to be the wife of a man who insisted that he was a bachelor. Arriving here, I discovered that the supposedly dying patient was not ill. He was merely suffering from a lack of sleep and other contributory dissipations. I—"

"I knew it!" McCann's howled. "A bachelor's wife and a dying patient who ain't even sick! I knew it. You got to dig up another screwy mess! You got to stop it!"

The sergeant all but danced. His big red face became two shades darker, about the right color to be described as a ripe magenta. He seemed to have a little trouble with his breathing, but the basic cause was not asthma.

"Go ahead!" he yelled. "What happened?"

True released the door edge. He could stand now without swaying. He recovered his hat and set it precisely on his head. He would have felt half naked out on the street without the hat and his bag.

"I distinctly recall seeing a beautiful young lady in an evening dress, Sergeant McCann." He spoke bitingly, but the twinkle became brighter and brighter in his eyes. Pete and Mac were standing behind McCann, staring at him. "The dress, by the way, was a very light shade of blue. The young lady was

a blonde, natural, I believe. Her name was Adele. She took the packages of money from the table and ran after the three men started shooting at—"

"Money and a dame, and three guys shooting!" McCann bawled. "I knew it! I oughta jail you for life! I oughta—"

The sergeant's room-shaking roar dropped abruptly to a plaintive note.

"Look. Tell it so's a guy can understand it. I got to know all about it. Look. A bachelor's wife called you that her husband is dying and you come here, and the guy ain't her husband and he ain't dying. He ain't even sick. Then three guys shoot at somebody about something, and one guy takes a slug in the head. The stiff's here until I get here and then he's gone. Then a dame in a blue dress grabs some dough and scrams."

There was a little sweat on McCann's broad forehead.

"Exactly." True spoke crisply. "The cadaver was carried away by the two surviving ruffians, who, apparently, were reluctant to leave. His name, I believe, was Jacob. The other men spoke of him as Jake. The two surviving ruffians were named Emanuel and Joseph. Unfortunately, the opportunity to learn their last names did not present itself. There were several packages of money on the table near the windows, totaling, I believe, several thousands of dollars. After the three men burst into the room and began firing, the young lady took the money from the table and ran into the bedroom."

Mac promptly wheeled and ran into the bedroom. He came back almost instantly and said sourly:

"Fire escape."

Mac, Pete and McCann stared at True.

"The smaller of the two ruffians," True explained swiftly, "attempted to fire a shot at me. I struck him with my medical bag. The larger ruffian dealt me a vicious, cowardly blow on the head with his pistol, rendering me virtually unconscious. The two ruffians then carried the cadaver away. The smaller of the two men, Emanuel, was suffering from a severe asthmatic condition."

"Asthma!" McCann squalled. "Bachelors' wives! Stiffs! Dough! Dames! Now—asthma!"

He waved big arms wildly. His eyes seemed to bulge.

"Exactly," True agreed pleasantly. "Asthma."

He recovered his medical bag and brushed at the front of his dark-gray coat.

"If, Sergeant McCann," he continued, his voice crisply professional. "you wish to question me further about this most extraordinary affair, I may be found in my medical offices. I trust you gentlemen have a most pleasant evening."

Neither Mac, Pete nor Sergeant McCann made a move to stop him as he strode to the apartment door and went out into the hall.

A police ambulance was pulling in to the curb as he drove his light coupé away from the apartment building. Only then did he realize that he had not even thought of administering first aid to the wounded Wayne Hutton!

His lean shoulder lifted in a dismissing shrug and he frowned at the windshield as he drove the coupé toward the narrow brownstone on the other side of town. He had driven several blocks before he realized that he had not recovered the bill given to him by the girl.

His frown deepened.

The fee was immaterial. He was glad that he had left the bill. The entire matter was now in the hands of the police. He had nothing to do with it, nothing. That was as it should be. He was a physician, not a crime buster. He had quite enough trouble to satisfy him for the rest of his life. He winced at even thinking of the word, and wished fervently that he would never hear the word again. It made him think of the name the police had given him—Doc Trouble. He did not like the name. It was—well, it was unethical.

Stopping the coupé at the curb before the narrow brownstone, he crossed the sidewalk, mounted the stone steps and went into his reception room.

As he closed the front door and turned, every muscle and nerve in his body went taut. An involuntary grunt of surprise escaped his suddenly straight lips.

The door of his combination consultation room and surgery was open. The light in the room was on. He saw a blond young lady in a light-blue evening dress standing beside his leather-topped examination table. Several packages of bank notes were piled on the table top. The money was that which he had seen in Wayne Hutton's apartment a short time ago. The young lady was the person who had taken that money from the table in Wayne Hutton's apartment—Adele!

CHAPTER IV.

"JUST LIKE THAT!"

Douglas True's lips tightened indignantly. He crossed the reception room and went into the consultation room. Sliding the medical bag onto the telephone table, he faced the girl. The rims of his sensitive nostrils were flared slightly. Some of the calmness had returned to his eyes, but they held more than a little anger.

"My dear young lady," he said crisply, "I am sure that you will pardon my unseemly reluctance to participate further in anything concerning you and Mr. Wayne Hutton. The attitude is understandable, in view of certain things which have occurred tonight." He touched the blood still crusted on his temple. "I assure you that I seriously regret the necessity of informing the police that you and this money are now in my medical offices."

He reached for the telephone.

"No! Please! Dr. True! Please!" The girl's voice was very shrill. It carried fright. She ran to him and caught his arm in slim, red-nailed fingers. She was jerking. "Wait a few minutes. Please. Please listen to me first."

True looked down at the girl. She was very pretty, and there was an appealing, little-girl something about her. It disturbed him.

"Very well," he said brusquely. "A few minutes can make very little difference. You may proceed."

The girl swallowed, wetted red lips. The slim hands tightened on True's arm.

"Wayne?" She had to whisper it, as though afraid to speak aloud. Her eyes were wet. They held terror, and pleading. "He . . . isn't—"

"No." True's voice was a bit gentle. "Two bullets struck him, high in the left shoulder, I believe. There seems to be little danger of the wounds proving immediately fatal. Mr. Hutton was taken by the police, and, according to the usual police procedure in matters of this nature, he will be hospitalized and well guarded until the matter is termi-

nated to the entire satisfaction of the authorities."

"Oh! I'm so glad!" The girl sagged against him, quivering. She was crying. "You don't know . . . how much . . . it means to me!" She sobbed.

True cleared his throat. He did know.

Very obviously, the girl was very much in love with Mr. Wayne Hutton, the bachelor. He shook the girl a little and pushed her away.

"Now, young lady," he said, steadying professional brusqueness in his voice, "we shall hear your explanation."

Adele leaned against the examination table, slim hands on the table edge. Color had come back to her cheeks, her eyes were brighter, and some of the terror was gone.

"I am . . . a shill."

Her voice, though still a trifle shrill, was pleasant. She seemed to glow with a determined purpose.

True frowned slightly.

"A . . . ah . . . shill?"

"That's right." The girl talked swiftly. "A shill is a come-on, a . . . a sort of bait for squirrels." She noted True's deeper frown. "A squirrel is a chump, a . . . a sucker. You know, an easy mark, someone asking to be taken, a red-hot looking for a sure thing. He's ready to take somebody else to ride on his own horse. You know, someone always looking for a chance to gyp someone. Well, a shill is a person who spots people like that and helps to lead them to the sure thing. Not exactly that, but . . . I work as a shill at Ronn's, playing the wheels and the other games on the house to start the ball rolling. Ronn's is a sort of . . . well, it's a dine and dance, with a sucker's paradise upstairs—wheels, dice, cards and other gambling games. You understand?"

"Ronn's is an establishment which resorts to illegal practices to satisfy the popular demand for games of . . . ah . . . chance." True nodded gravely. "I believe I understand. Your peculiar duties as a . . . ah . . . shill consist of pretending to participate in the games to . . . ah . . . accelerate the play, to encourage the . . . ah . . . squirrels to become actively engaged in the game. You are, specifically, a sort of hostess extraordinary in Ronn's." True smiled. "I have heard of the establishment. It it situated near the city limits, and it bears a rather . . . ah . . . unsavory reputation."

"That's right. It's a dump." The girl said that flatly. Some of the brightness went out of her eyes. "I came up here from a small country town two years ago, expecting to get a job on the stage. I couldn't sing. I couldn't act. I couldn't dance. My voice isn't suited to radio, or—anything. I was a washout. But even washouts have to eat. I wouldn't go back home and live off my folks. I'd been in Ronn's with a friend. That was when I was trying to land something. After the washout, I heard that Ronn's needed a few girls as shills. It was . . . respectable. It isn't such . . . honest . . . work, perhaps. But it's respectable, see?"

She frowned a little as she tried to make True understand.

"I make five dollars a night. Ronn's gives me twenty dollars a night to play with, but I have to check it back when I go off duty. Wayne came into Ronn's about a month ago. I . . . liked him. He came back several times, but didn't notice me—particularly. Last night, he came back to Ronn's and started

to give things a whirl. He lost a few dollars at first, then started to have a streak of luck. He won. He rode his luck and played on through until tonight."

The girl waved a slim hand at the money on the table.

"He won thirty-eight thousand."

True jumped. He couldn't help it. His throat became very dry.

"He won it and collected it in cash. Ronn had to pay. He couldn't welsh before a full house. People wouldn't come there any more, if he refused to pay off. Wayne took the money and carried it to his apartment. That was a little after eight o'clock tonight."

The girl wetted her lips, rushed on.

"After he left, I called you and told you he was sick and I was his wife." Her red lips twisted bitterly. "Maybe the last was just wishful thinking, but—anyway, I wanted somebody with Wayne until I could get there. I slipped out of Ronn's and called you from a pay phone, then headed for the apartment in a taxi. I thought a doctor could get places in a hurry, and I couldn't call the police.

"I tried to call Wayne, but he wouldn't answer. He was playing safe, because it could have been someone just checking to see if he was in the apartment. I went up the fire escape just before those men came in. You were already there, as I hoped you would be. I . . . I just wanted to help Wayne. You know . . . the rest—"

Her bare shoulders lifted. True could see that her lips were quivering.

"All I have to do now," she went on a bit flatly, "is keep this money for Wayne, somehow. It's his. He won it fairly. I can't let the cops get it, or me. I can't go back to Ronn's now. They won't like me now, because—"

"They won't, sister!"

The harsh voice came from behind True. It was the harsh voice of the large man whom he had seen in Wayne Hutton's apartment, the man whom Manny had called Joe.

True turned slowly, and saw Joe standing in the open doorway leading into the reception room. Joe's big, dark face was split with a grin that had not the slightest semblance of mirth about it. His big, dark eyes glinted in the glow of the consultation-room light. There was a heavy automatic in his right fist.

Behind Joe, True saw Manny, the thin, bony man with the asthmatic wheeze and cough. Manny's sharp face was twitching with excitement, and his little black eyes were very bright. He held a gun in his bony right fist.

"The dough, the dame and the doc!" Joe said that harshly. "Manny, we got the works sewed up. Thirty-eight grand!"

Joe came into the consultation room, treading heavily. His big, dark eyes fixed upon the money piled on the examination table.

Manny came into the room behind Joe.

"Get the lunch hooks up, doc," he wheezed. "You too, sister." He waved the gun in his right fist at True and the girl. Joe went to the examination table and started cramming the money into his coat pockets. "Get 'em up and keep 'em up!" Manny snarled. "Just like that!"

CHAPTER V.

THE GLASS GUN.

"What," True demanded acidly, "is the meaning of this armed invasion? Leave these offices instantly!

I shall notify the police of—"

He moved toward the telephone table, hardly expecting to be permitted to call the police, but he had read somewhere of someone knocking the telephone receiver from the hook. An alert operator had caught a word or two which indicated that the telephone subscriber was in difficulty, and notified the police. He intended to duplicate that unusual method.

Manny's gun lifted a little, its muzzle centering on True's chest.

"Be your age, doc," Manny wheezed asthmatically. "Touch that phone, and I cool you! Joe, forget the dough long enough to get things straight. The dame and the doc saw us at Hutton's. You know the answer. We better take 'em out somewhere and drop 'em. Get going, doc. You, too, sister. The car's right out front, behind the doc's heap. Get moving."

True reached for his medical bag. It was a deliberate gesture. An idea that he might be able to use some of the bag's contents to prevent that which he knew was coming had flashed into his mind.

"Hold it, doc. Leave the—" Manny started.

"Aw, let him take it, Manny," Joe broke in harshly. "It'll look like he's gone out on a call, see?"

"O. K." Manny motioned with the gun. "Take the stuff and get out to the car, and make it snappy."

Prodding True with the gun, Manny marched him out through the reception room and to the dark sedan parked at the curb behind the coupé. Joe, his blue-serge coat bulging with money-filled pockets, handled Adele. Manny got into the rear compartment with True and the girl. Joe drove, alone on the front seat. The girl sat in the left corner of the rear seat. True was in the middle, Manny to his right.

The sedan swooped out into the street and bored through the night. It was nearing midnight. True's mind was moving much faster than the sedan wheels as they whirred over the pavement. Joe headed for a secondary highway, leading west.

Suburban homes, little stores and filling stations sailed past. Then the sedan was speeding along an asphalt strip entirely free of other traffic. Darkness streamed past on either side, broken only by the lighted windows of occasional farm houses. Manny's asthmatic wheeze all but drowned out the noise of the sedan motor.

"I assume," True spoke mildly, as if talking about the weather, "that you gentlemen are Ronn employees."

"Guess again, doc." Manny laughed and started coughing.

True caught the negative movement of Adele's blond head. The girl was sitting tensely beside him.

"Jake Nome was a Ronn hot-shot," Manny wheezed. "That's why we couldn't leave him up at Hutton's. Joe and me are foreign talent." Manny laughed again, and started coughing.

"Why spill everything, Manny?" Joe flung over his shoulder. "We ain't out of this thing yet, and—"

"Why not spill?" Manny wheezed. "Doc and the dame ain't going to tell anybody."

Douglas True wetted his lips.

Manny and Joseph couldn't let them live, of course. They had seen the two men in Hutton's apartment. The two men had admitted removing Jake Nome's body. Adele and Douglas True, M. D., were dangerous, living, to Manny and Joe. They were scheduled to die within the hour, and their bodies were to be

thrown into a culvert, perhaps a thicket.

True stared at the back of Joe's big, dark head. His lips straightened. Death wouldn't be so very unpleasant. One had to die, eventually. He would like very much, however, to return with interest the blow Joe had struck him!

He heard Adele whimper beside him. The girl was shuddering.

"You ruffians cannot perpetrate deliberate murder with immunity," Doc Trouble said sharply. "The police will—"

"Be your age, doc." Manny laughed and coughed again. "I'll give you twenty to one that we do get away with it—that and the thirty-eight grand. Ronn'll never see any of that dough again, hey, Joe?"

"And how!" Joe kept his attention on driving. The sedan was racing over the dark highway at better than sixty miles an hour. "Twenty-five percent! A laugh! Hah! Somewhere along here, Manny?" The sedan slowed a trifle.

"Couple of miles," Manny wheezed.

They became silent.

"Am I to understand, then, that Ronn offered you men twenty-five percent of the thirty-eight thousand dollars to recover the money from Wayne Hutton? Jacob Nome, a Ronn man, went with you to make certain that the remaining seventy-five percent was returned to Ronn's?"

True was frowning. Things were beginning to become clear in his mind.

"Bull's-eye, doc," Manny wheezed. "We ditched Jake because he would pin it on Ronn's. Ronn'd cross me and Joe, if the cops squeezed him, see? He couldn't afford to be nicked for thirty-eight grand right now, but had to pay off to Hutton because a welsh would queer his spot. He figured to pay off to quiet the suckers, then tap Hutton for the dough. A spot's nuts to let that much get away. Something always happens to winners up where I come from." Manny laughed and coughed. His eyes bulged with the effort of catching his breath, but the gun in his right hand remained steady. It was trained on True's ribs.

"You mean winners are allowed to retain their . . . ah . . . winnings only long enough to impress other . . . ah . . . squirrels, to encourage them to play the games?"

True asked that very innocently. As he talked, his left hand, hidden from Manny, was in motion. The long fingers slid to the latch on the medical bag, unfastened it. Thrusting into the bag, those fingers brushed over the orderly chaos of stethoscope, sheathed scalpels, vials and other medical equipment, identifying each by touch.

"You catch on quick, doc." Manny coughed again. "Another couple of minutes, Joe, then—" Manny stopped talking.

True's surgeon-trained fingers moved swiftly. Quickly, he found and opened the hypodermic case in the medical bag. Moving delicately, surely, the fingers fitted a hair-thin needle to the glass-barreled instrument. They located a rubber-stoppered bottle in the bag, extracted the stopper.

"O. K., Joe," Manny wheezed. "Past that little filling station and around the curve. There's a culvert around there, a big one. Stop there."

The sedan began to lose a little of its speed.

True dropped the hypodermic, leaned forward and slammed Joe with his right fist!

True heard Adele crying softly.

His hidden left hand moved swiftly. Withdrawing the charged hypodermic from the medical bag, he raised it to the level of his chest. Manny's bulging eyes caught the movement and he leaned forward a little to see better. True leveled the hypodermic and thrust home the piston with a quick, hard jerk.

A needle-thin stream of clear liquid shot squarely into Manny's sharp face, spattering his mouth and nostrils. The acrid smell of ammonia became noticeable in the sedan.

Manny tried to scream, but couldn't. He made a gagging, strangling sound. The gun slid from his hand and he clawed at his face and throat, madly. His eyes bulged even more.

"Manny! What the—"

Joe looked back over his shoulder. There was fear in his sharp voice.

True dropped the hypodermic, leaned forward, and hit Joe as hard as he could in the mouth with his right fist. The impact of the blow jarred his arm up to the shoulder. It was a most satisfying experience.

Joe took his hands from the sedan wheel and clawed for the gun in his right coat pocket. The sedan swooped toward the ditch flanking the highway and Joe yelled in terror and caught the wheel again. The little filling station was coming toward the sedan, a bright spot in an otherwise dark night. Rubber squalled as Joe's feet found the clutch and brake.

True hit him again, the forward movement imparted to his body by the abrupt slowing of the car adding to the force of the blow. True winced as the skin split over his knuckles.

Joe got the gun from his coat pocket, then dropped it on the front seat. He slid down in the seat a little and pitched forward, his chin coming down on the horn button. The sedan's horn started a raucous blast that disturbed the night. A man ran out of the little filling station and looked around. The filling station was about a hundred feet away. The sedan bucked a couple of times, then stopped, with a dead motor. Its right wheels were but a foot over the edge of the pavement. The filling-station attendant trotted toward the sedan's lights, expecting to find a car out of gas.

True scooped Joe's gun from the front seat and turned back to Manny. The sharp-featured little asthmatic was beginning to recover. He was breathing. True leaned over and hit him on the top of the head with Joe's gun, just in case.

Then the filling-station attendant was beside the car. He helped True get the sedan to the station and found enough wire to bind Manny and Joe very securely. That job finished, he showed True the telephone.

Within moments, Sergeant McCann's gruff voice sounded in the receiver at True's ear.

"This," he informed McCann crisply, "is Doctor Douglas True. I—"

"Go away!" McCann's roaring bellow almost indicated that telephones were superfluous so far as he was concerned. "I can't find no stiff named Jake! I can't find no dough! The bachelor is balmy—he can't talk—he's out cold! I don't want no more screw messes until I get this straight! I been down here trying to get a line on— Aw, hell!"

Nothing but a sputter came out of the telephone for a few moments.

"Sergeant McCann," True said crisply, his gray eyes twinkling brightly, "this is not another sequence of extraordinary incidents. It is merely a continuation of matters concerning the . . . ah . . . balmy bachelor, as you so succintly describe Mr. Wayne Hutton."

True smiled. He couldn't help it. Sergeant McCann always affected him like that.

"The two ruffians I mentioned

earlier in the evening are now in their sedan in the driveway of a small filling station beside Highway 46. I am reasonably sure that they will remain as they are until you arrive with your myrmidons. You see, Sergeant McCann, I deemed the precautionary measure of securing them with wire advisable. They—"

"Who are they?" McCann howled. "Where's the stiff? Where's the dough? Where's the dame? What's it all about? How—"

"If, Sergeant McCann," True cut in acidly, mouth corners twitching, "you defer your impromptu impersonation of an aroused masculine bovoid animal, I shall explain."

"Bo . . . bo— Huh? McCann's yell rattled the receiver diaphragm.

"Reverting temporarily to the vernacular, Sergeant McCann," True said gravely, "skip it. The two ruffians in question may be classified as out-of-town hoodlums. I am reasonably sure that you may persuade them to inform you as to their method of disposing of the cadaver. The cadaver, by the way, was an employee of an establishment known as Ronn's. His name was Jacob Nome. Unfortunately, I haven't yet ascertained the last names of Joseph and Emanuel.

"The entire affair involved the winning of thirty-eight thousand dollars. Wayne Hutton was the fortunate gentleman. Ronn's could ill afford to lose this amount and tried to get it back."

Adele, standing near the telephone, smiled at True. He smiled back, and sighed. Wayne Hutton was a very, very fortunate man.

"The young lady in question, Sergeant McCann, was a . . . ah . . . shill at Ronn's. Apparently, she overheard the plan to recover the money from Wayne Hutton, and risked her life to help Hutton. The exact details are immaterial, but you may be sure that I shall consider it my personal duty to inform Mr. Wayne Hutton of those details, particularly as they apply to Miss Adele."

True saw the girl's face go red, very red. Her eyes were wet and starry.

"The money in question is here. It belongs to Wayne Hutton, and I shall exert every effort to see that he receives it. And now, Sergeant McCann, if you will exercise reasonable haste in coming out here and—"

"But . . . how did you . . . uh . . . them two hoods—" McCann choked.

"Fortunately," True told him crisply, "my medical bag contained ammonia. I used my hypodermic as a glass gun, to propel a stream of the ammonia into Emanuel's face. Emanuel, I am sure you will recall, Sergeant McCann, is suffering from a severe asthmatic condition. Asthma and ammonia are, to say the least, incompatible."

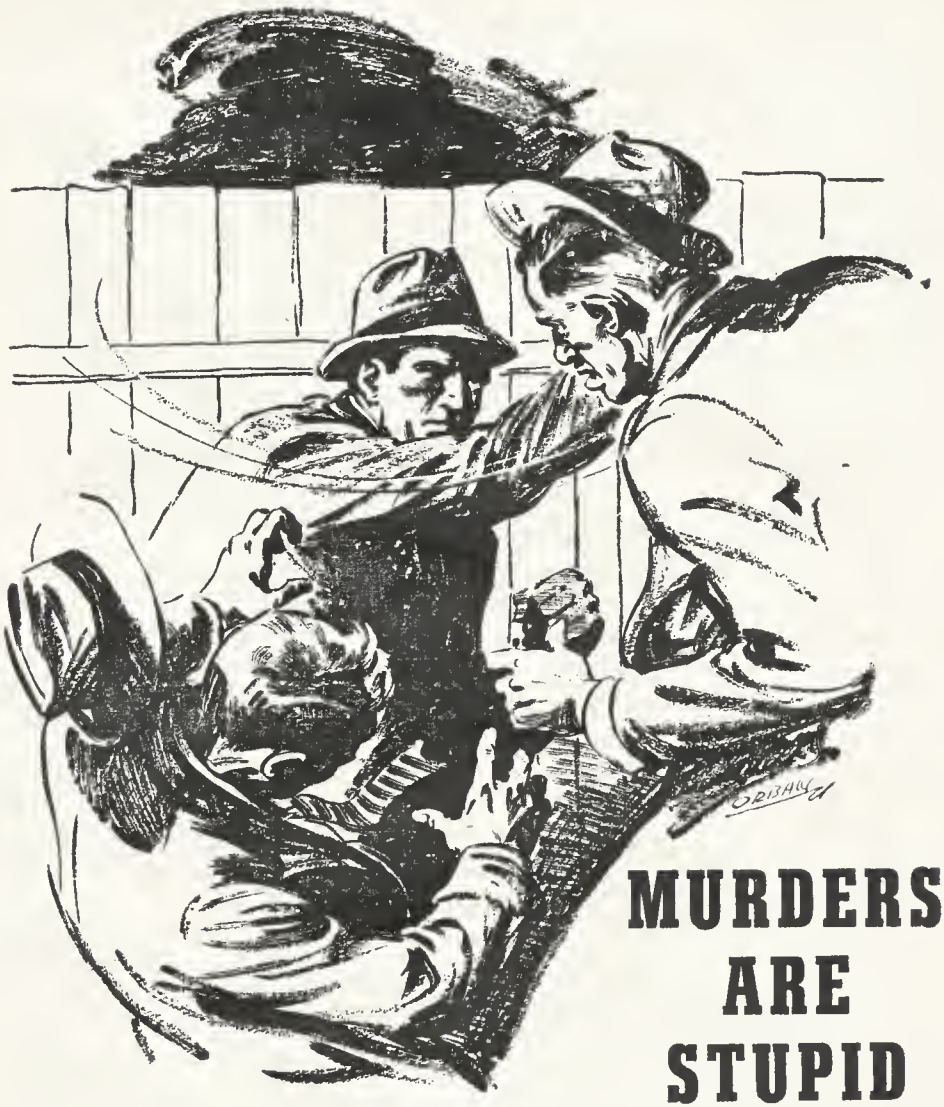
"Now it's ammonia!" McCann yelled. "Balmy bachelors! Dames! Dough! Stiffs! Shooting! Asthma! Now it's— Yeah! Look here, Doc Trouble! You got to—"

"May I suggest, Sergeant McCann," True cut in bitingly, "that you employ this wasted energy in coming out here to take into custody the two ruffians? And again permit me to remind you that my name is not Doc—"

Douglas True, M. D., winced at even thinking of the word. He could not bring himself to the point of saying it.

He pronged the receiver.

THE END.



MURDERS ARE STUPID

by MARK HARPER

Cass Manning, ace of the homicide squad, ran into a real thrilleroo when he found a girl who seemed dead but was alive—and then a man who should have been alive—but wasn't!

Dutch Salzburger was at the wheel of the coupé, and Cass and I were dividing the room his big hulk left. Dutch liked to drive with his arms spread over the wheel and his elbows sticking out. Maybe it let him breathe easier, but that didn't help us any. We didn't kick. Dutch was

sweet on that job; the faster he went the surer he seemed to be, and we were hitting it plenty right now, with the siren clearing the thick spots and giving him a chance to open up. And he liked that, too.

We'd had a fast call; a funny one, too, according to Cass, who took it. There was murder up ahead. We'd get enough of it when we got there, and I guess that's why we weren't talking about it. I'd noticed we'd hit the quiet streets—the higher-the-rent, the lower-the-noise kind—but what Dutch was saying had nothing to do with them.

"Doc says I been getting too much Vitamin B's," he grunted. He rolled his arms and shaved a fly off a rear bumper that stuck out too far. "He says that's why I got so much gas."

"If B stands for beer, he's right," I told him. "You ought to eat your pig knuckles, not drown 'em."

"Yeah, yeah." And that's as far as Dutch got.

Something raked across his right forearm and crashed hard against the door just in front of Cass' knees.

"Brake!" Cass yelled, as if he'd been wide-awake all the time and was just waiting for this. "Kid, take the alley round the corner back fast. Sergeant, go on and hold the works. Somebody doesn't want us there so soon."

Then he was out the door and running back across the street toward the apartment house on the left. The car was still moving plenty, and Dutch got the nose pointed away from the opposite sidewalk, where he'd slewed when his number fourteen went shush on the pedal, and stepped us around the corner as if we were going there anyway. Dutch can act pretty quick sometimes, when somebody else does the thinking for him.

But I forgot about Dutch. As I sprinted down that back alley I was wondering how Cass could be so quick on the pickup. I'd seen him spot the bullet hole in the door, get the angle to Dutch's arm, then line up on an open window in a second-story apartment. And then I forgot about Cass; that is, I forgot what he'd done and began to think what he might be doing now.

The alley ran between two fairly high board fences. I figured that the closed door I was coming to was about right for the apartment house Cass had picked, and put on the brakes. Then I looked for knot-holes and found a small one right handy to the door. I got an eye to it and picked out a cement walk leading to steps and a door and everything neat and trim, which of course, the customers were paying for in their rent bills. It was that kind of a place; all nice and quiet, front and back, if not too swanky. And then it wasn't so quiet.

When a couple of things hit your eye and ear at the same time, did you ever try to figure which gets plugged in first? I wasn't doing any figuring, but that's about what happened. Up in that house somewhere, a gun cut loose, and it sounded to me about the caliber Cass liked. There were only two shots, and although they were muffled from inside, they were both from the same gun or the same caliber. At the same moment, sort of between the two fast reports, the door I was looking at burst open and two guys were trying to climb over each other to see which one could get out first.

They got out somehow, but they didn't loiter around that exit. They came down that cement walk for the fence and the door as if they thought they were Chuck Fenske and Glenn Cunningham breezing it for the tape.

Now, I've got a funny habit. Cass has given me hell for it more than once. When things begin to get to close quarters I can't seem to remember that I tote a gun. Maybe it was that habit that made me forget it this time. Then it might have been that neither guy showed that he had one, or perhaps the sly grins that were on their dirty muggs. The time they were making told that they didn't have any liking for what was behind them, at the same time they looked as if they thought they were putting over a fast one. Then they hit the door.

Like the other one, they came out this door sort of both together. It was a set-up. They had their chins stuck out, and all I had to do was to hang a one-two on them; then I had them piled one on top of the other and cluttering the doorway. I pulled them inside, shut the door and started to look them over. Of course you can't tell how mean a guy really is unless he's wide awake and you see his eyes in action, but they were a couple of tough birds all right, and not too well fixed, from the looks of their clothes.

Each lad had a gat, too, and when I pulled those out I decided that my timing hadn't been so bad, after all. If they'd cleared that door and had me up the alley it might not have been so sweet for me, not with that absent-mindedness of mine about guns. I broke them and had a look. One was fully loaded, except where the hammer rested; the other had one empty, and the powder smell was strong and the soot fresh in the barrel. This lad promised to be our candidate, and I knew Dutch would be glad to have a word with him, alone.

I put the gun back on him, to tag him for Cass. He was a pretty solid chunk of a guy, but he had a sharp face and his eyes were close together at the bridge of a big nose. I was standing there, looking down at the two of them and wondering what their joke was so hot about, when Cass came out the house door. And I'd been thinking about that, too; for it must have been all of three or four minutes since I'd heard those pops inside.

Along with Cass was a harness bull. Where he'd got him in that time I couldn't guess. Maybe he'd pulled him out of his pocket; I didn't know anyone else who could produce 'em so fast when they're needed. I showed Cass the exhibits. He didn't say anything on that; I didn't expect him to. He turned to the radio cop.

"Clancy," he said, "you and Meserve run 'em in. Book 'em on a Sullivan and keep them out of sight and separate. Wait," he said, as the big cop started back. "I'll send your partner in. They might wake up and fly away on you," with a grin at me. He knew damned well I don't lay them on so easy. "Come on, kid."

When I stepped in the doorway I saw the hallway had a clear run to the front, about forty feet. I'd seen a couple of bullet marks on the door, low down. Cass can drive a nail at that distance, so I got the idea he'd shooed them out for me to bag. Just why, was his idea. Cass sent the second cop with his car around into the alley for the pick-up, but instead of going on up the street, he led the way upstairs. There was an elevator cage on the ground floor, and in the crack that was open I saw a pair of eyes that had a lot of white around them. The face should have been black, but it looked sickly yellow to me. There

didn't seem to be any other help around, and we didn't hear anyone talking as Cass opened a door on the next floor and we went in. It was that sort of a place.

And this apartment was a pip; five or six rooms, I judged, from the doors and what I could see from the big living room. And it had cost real money to furnish it; quietly rich, if you know what I mean; with a lot of books and a peach of a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl in a silver frame on the mantel. I slowed down for a good look, but Cass was going on, and I followed him across a corridor into a bedroom; and that was rich, too. But I forgot about the furnishings.

A gal was stretched on the bed, on the outside of the coverlet that wasn't even ruffled. She was fully dressed in a sort of tweed traveling suit, and she was tied, plenty. Her mouth was taped and her eyes were closed, but I knew at once she was the girl of the picture. She was so still I shot a glance at Cass. He shook his head.

"Doped," he said, and got busy tearing off the tape and cutting the rope. He was careful about that tape, too, holding it by a thin edge, then slipping it into an envelope he had in his pocket. He coiled the rope and stuffed that away, found the gal's hat and laid it on the bed beside her. Then I watched him snooping through closets and all the other rooms in the place, but what he wanted to find I didn't know, and he didn't tell me. He went into the bathroom a second time, took a bottle from the shelf that looked like a woman's smelling salts, and back in the bedroom set it uncorked close to the girl's nose. Then we beat it.

CHAPTER II.

MURDER RAP.

Up at the next corner—we had only a half a dozen blocks to go—a precinct flivver was at the curb, a plain-clothes lad stuck his nose out at us. Cass nodded at him.

"Fuller," he said, "it's a tail job." He indicated the apartment house and described the girl. "She'll be out in a few minutes. Get word to the office where she lights. You can leave her there. Come on, kid."

Trying to dope what it was all about only gave me a headache, so I tried to think how in three or four minutes Cass could have found the gal, phoned this lad in and snared the radio car as well. I knew he was fast, but this looked like miracle work to me; besides, I guessed he knew the name of every guy on the pay roll, to hear him call 'em off.

"Of course you know whose apartment that is, kid?" he said.

"I haven't gone in for mind reading yet," I told him.

"Albert Garth's," he said. "Slick Al, the boys call him. But Gentleman Albert would fit him better."

He got that far when I stopped.

"Hell, Cass"—and I was so excited I forgot to call him Cap—"we're headed for Garth's place now, on that murder call!"

Cass grinned.

"That's what makes it all so interesting," he said. "Come on; or we'll find the sergeant absorbing too many of his B's."

But if Cass found anything funny in it, I couldn't. I put my stride against his.

"Say," and I meant it, "what is this lay, anyway?"

"You have seen as much as I," he shot back quick. "Maybe more."

"All I saw that you didn't," I gave him, "was those two lugs, be-

fore I busted them, grinning like a couple of . . . of—"

"Cheshire cats," Cass helped me out.

"I've heard of Cheshire cheese," I snarled at him, but he'd gripped my arm. He's a little guy beside Dutch and me, only about five feet nine or ten, but he can grip like steel, no fooling.

"That," he said quietly, "is about the most important point we've turned up yet."

"Important!" I howled. "Oh, hell!"

"Important enough to save a man's life, maybe."

But we were on the right block now, and I let it go.

Dutch had parked the coupé smack in front of the door between the "No Parking" signs, as of course he would. Behind it was another coupé, a little classier than the city could afford for homicide.

A long-faced, mournful-looking guy peeked at us from a wicket and unlocked the door when Cass flashed his badge. He locked it after us. The place looked as deserted as the Desert of Sahara, and was about as noisy.

"You will want to go upstairs," the guy said, and pussy-footed us up there. We heard an "Ah!" and something knocked a table. Then we went into a square room. Dutch pushed his beer mug away from him and got red in the face. Across the table Gentleman Albert Garth was sitting, and what I mean, he was just sitting. Only his eyes moved at us and there was no more expression I could read in them than the dead pan of his dark, good-looking face showed.

Murder isn't good to look at any time, but there's something about a young lad getting it that grips you. And this lad was young; only about twenty-two or three. I judged, a well-dressed, clean-looking boy, too, and, although I knew I'd never seen him before, there was something very familiar in his features.

He was flat on his back, one arm on his chest with that side of his coat pulled open, the other outstretched on the floor, and in his hand was a wad of bills. More bills showed, too, sticking out from his pocket under that other hand. He was lying in front of a safe, its door wide open, and there wasn't a mark on the lad, that I could see, to show how he'd got it.

Cass Manning hadn't spoken a word. He was down on his knees beside the lad. Very carefully, hold-

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ing only the edges, he slipped the outside bills in the boy's hand from the rest of the wad; then he did the same trick with the stack that was partly in the pocket. I happened to look at Garth then, and I saw a little glint of light come into his eyes, the first sign of anything at all he had shown. Cass tucked the bills into another big enevelope, put an "r" on one side, an "l" on the other and shoved it into his pocket. He looked at the boy carefully, then stood up.

"You want to tell us, Garth," he asked, "that you caught him at it and stopped him?"

"I don't." Garth's tone was as quiet and cold as that of Gass Manning.

"I didn't think you would. How did it happen?"

Garth nodded his sleek head toward Dutch.

"He came in right after me," the Dutchman said promptly.

"He's not very helpful, Manning," Garth said, and there was a slight tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "But everyone here can tell you this is the first time I've been here today."

"Where have you been, say, the past two or three hours?"

Garth shook his head.

"I wasn't here. That's enough, isn't it?"

"You haven't been at your apartment since early morning, anyway," Cass gave him.

"Not since yesterday," Garth said slowly.

"Then you don't know what is there." It was half statement, half question.

Garth's eyes narrowed slightly, and they were hard. He didn't say anything. Cass fumbled in his pocket, pulled out something and held up two long tickets where Garth could see. I made out "Miami," then I looked at Garth.

It wasn't the way he looked; I guess it was more the way he didn't look anything you could read, but if I ever saw a man holding back hell that wanted to come out of his eyes, it was Garth right then.

"You going to tell me something, Manning?" and his tone was as rigid as his face.

"No more than you are telling me," Cass said.

He slipped the tickets back into his pocket, found a chair and kept silent. Perhaps it was a new kind of third degree he was trying on Garth, hoping for a break; then I got the idea he was stalling for some reason or other as I saw his eyes slide around and rest a second on the telephone. For a few minutes the silence in that room seemed to yell out loud.

Then a break came; but it was not inside the room. I heard a step in the corridor; then a voice called, sort of cheerfully:

"Al; oh, Al!"

"All right, Cleve," Garth said, without raising his voice very much.

The door came open all the way, it had been left just ajar, and a man showed in the doorway; another long-faced guy, but this lad's map wasn't mournful. He had a grin, and his eyes were bright, and he wasn't a bad-appearing fellow as far as looks go. He hesitated on the threshold when he saw the rest of us.

"I wanted to ask you if you know where Bug Masters and Purdy are, Al," he said, sort of apologetically. "I've got an errand for them. But I won't bother you while you're busy."

"Come in, Cleve," Garth said quietly.

And Cleve came all the way in,

sort of grinning in a friendly way around. Then the grin was wiped off his map, like a wet rag taking dust off a window, and he let out a yell. He'd got in far enough to see what was on the floor.

"My God! My God!" he yelped. "What happened! For—"

He stopped and looked slowly around at Garth. "It's Tom Carr," he said almost in a whisper, and his voice was hoarse. "Leona's brother! For God's sake, what happened, Al?"

Garth shook his head.

"I just got here, Cleve, right on top of the first cop."

"But . . . but you'll have to tell Leona. Does she know? Don't make me do it, Al. I couldn't. It will kill her. But does she know it already?"

"I just got here, Cleve," Garth said again.

By that time the guy had lamped the bills and the open safe door, and he put his hands to his head at the sight and as the meaning of it struck him.

"You can't tell that to Leona, Al," he muttered. He turned appealingly to Cass Manning, but before he could say anything more the phone bell rang.

"Can I answer that, Manning?" Garth asked in his hard, toneless voice.

Cass straightened a little in his chair, as if this had been what he'd been waiting for all along. He nodded, and for a second Garth's eyes met his.

"Yes," Garth said quietly into the mouthpiece. Then he listened, but the receiver was pressed so close to his ear that I couldn't hear anything coming from it. "I will call you a little later," he said, and replaced the instrument gently.

Cass stood up and from his alertness I knew he was anxious to go.

"You won't be leaving town?" he said to Garth.

"Not until you give me back those tickets," Garth said slowly. He seemed to be a little more sure of himself, but I wouldn't have been in his spot for all of a million bucks.

Cass turned to the other man.

"Just who are you?" he asked in his routine way.

"Cleveland Stiles," Garth answered for him. "My right-hand man."

"Where do you live?" Cass asked Stiles, and this time Stiles gave the information himself.

"Where have you been the past few hours?" Cass asked again.

"Home. I just came from there. We rarely get here, Al and I, before late in the afternoon like this."

"Uh-huh. By the way what do those two men look like, Masters and Purdy?"

"Huh? Oh, Masters is a stocky fellow with a big nose. Purdy's about the same size, but not quite as solid."

Then there were more footsteps in the hall and the doc, followed by the camera and fingerprint men, came in. Cass waited only long enough for the doc's verdict: "Not longer than two hours ago; between one and two hours, best I can give you now. The knife in the back reached the heart. Only one blow. I should say the victim was bent over when he was hit."

Cass came back at that last and looked again at the body which the doc had rolled back to the position in which we had found it.

Cass swung around on Albert Garth.

"I've changed my mind, Garth," and for the first time his voice was

rasping and harsh. "I'm taking you in."

Garth gave him a long, hard look but he didn't bat an eyelash.

"You haven't got the slightest reason for this, Manning."

"I don't have to give my reason," Cass told him. "Stopping a thief in the act is one thing, but I haven't heard anyone come forward to tell that; so I'm calling it murder." And that gave me another angle to think over.

"Sergeant," Cass told Dutch, "you hold things right here until I send a relief, and I mean just that, sergeant. Kid, you take one of the men here"—a couple of extras had come in the squad car—"and comb this place and anywhere else you think might be likely for the knife. Come on, Garth."

"Cleve," Garth said, "you better leave this to the cops."

"Then I'll go home," Stiles answered, "and I'll be there if you need anything, Al. Say—want me to call Henderson? You ought not to be down there without a lawyer, Al."

"You can call your lawyer from headquarters," Cass said to Garth.

"No, thanks, Cleve," Garth said evenly. "I'll attend to it."

I found a lot of knives, but they were all in the place they were supposed to be and I couldn't just pick out one and say this is it; and I wasted plenty of time looking everywhere else. The mournful-looking guy had gone, and we had the place to ourselves, so we weren't too careful how we left things. I was getting fed up with it when Jelly, a man from the office, came in.

"Where's Dutch?" he asked.

"Upstairs, while the boys are finishing up," I told him.

"I'm to take over," Jelly said. "Cap says for you and him to get on," and he headed for the stairs, as if all that made sense to me.

But that was just like Cass. He wanted me to use my bean. Well, that was a tough one, but just as I heard Dutch pounding down the stairs, by some luck I happened to get an idea of what Cass might have had in mind when he'd told me to look "anywhere else likely," and the only place that fitted had to be Garth's apartment.

CHAPTER III.

BULLET CRASH.

I herded Dutch outside with an idea we'd hoof it, but there stood the coupé, and then I remembered Cass hadn't even asked Dutch for the keys. As we headed off, I noticed that the classy car had gone, but that didn't mean much to me. We got into the apartment house and were just going to take the stairs when the operator came all the way out of his cage, and he had a look as if he had something on his mind and didn't know what to do with it.

"All right," I growled at him. "What is it?"

"I just dunno ought I to tell," the boy said, doing a trick with the whites of his eyes.

"Spill it," I told him, and Dutch wheeled around on him and growled.

"That man who come in with you," he said to me, "said if I got something and didn't give, he'd give me a hot squat."

"So what?"

"Just after that lady'd done gone, a phone come in for Mr. Garth, and they said don't give it to anyone else nohow."

"We haven't got all night," I snapped at him. "What was it, and who gave it?"

"Mr. Phillips, and he says for Mr. Garth to come over quick."

I didn't know whether this was chance, luck or what, but I lost all interest in the knife, and as soon as we got the address, we piled out of there. It wasn't so far, and where Garth's place was on the outer fringe, this was getting into the heart of the better section where through traffic was lighter. And I guess that's why we noticed the car before it got all the way on top of us.

Dutch was cussing about his sore arm, but he forgot that when he saw a thick bumper sliding up to his left fender, and even I could see somebody was trying to ride us into the curb. But no one does that to Dutch, easy. He took the curb, yes; went halfway over on it, then shoved on the gas and shot us ahead of the guy, but he had a lively bus, too, and in a couple of seconds or so was up alongside of us again and starting to pinch us for another try.

"Let him have the works," I told Dutch, but he didn't need the advice, and this time he was ready for him.

He let them get half in front and just across our fender, then braked enough to let them slide half over, and down went his big hoof on the gas again. Dutch picked the spot to lay our heavy bumper against their rear fender, and he did a sweet job on it. More than that, he knocked the big car all the way around and when it got through teetering and settled on four wheels it was facing us.

The jar or something stalled our motor and maybe the bumper was caught; anyway, before Dutch could pull away, four tough lads boiled out maybe to tell us what a mistake we'd made, but outside of Dutch yelling his head off, there wasn't much talk between us. I saw them coming in time to slide out my side and put on a little rush myself against the two lads who had picked me for their meat, but from the sounds I was hearing I guess that Dutch had met his birds sitting.

Unless you're put out cold by the smash, there's something about a guy crashing you that gets you mad quicker than anything else I know, and I was hot, maybe too hot, when I lit into these mutts. They were no knockovers; I found that out when one slipped past me, when I was lining on his pal, and stung me with a clipper on the ear. That did two or three things: it took the steam out of my jab at the other guy, it made me madder than before, but that meant cooling me down to fight, and I got in a real sock as I came back from that jolt.

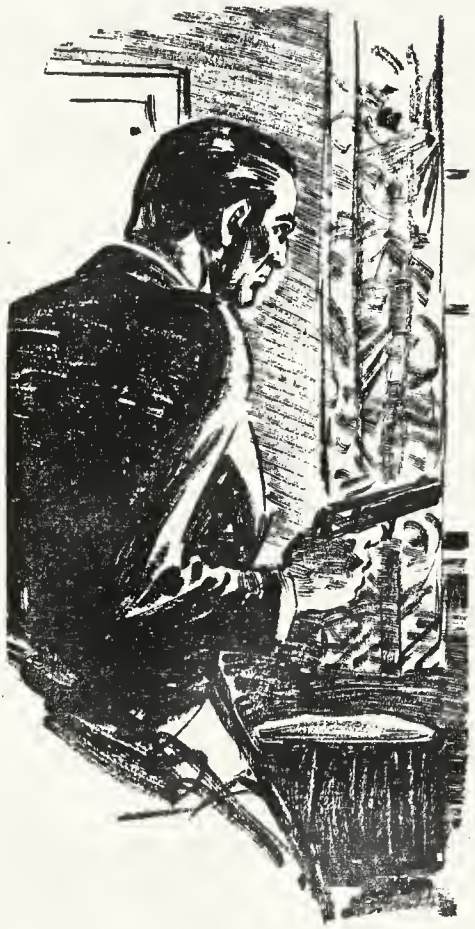
Taking on a good guy is one thing; a couple is something else, and both these lads knew a few tricks with the things they called their mitts. Still, this is my game and I had one down and was playing for the other when something new came into it. I was paying strict attention to the lad in front of me, but I heard the voice all right.

"Get outta the way, Kirk, and let me plug him."

I slapped in a left jab, shifted back a foot and took a look. Over the bum's shoulder, I saw a guy had stuck his head and a hand out the big car's front window. I didn't mind the head so much, but the gun in his hand looked like a cannon to me.

A whole lot of ideas crowded me at the same time. I was thinking what I'd do next to this lad who was holding up with me, and I was thinking, too, if I put him down or let him side-step me I was due for a big hunk of lead. But outside of that, some other thoughts hit me, or maybe they were just flash impressions.

Stiles' right hand streaked to his hip and brought up a gun—but Cass appeared to the right of me!



The first I got was this wasn't all clean fun at all; it was something more than a car driver's mix-up. Then, very late, I remembered that we'd been going somewhere, and with that I began to get the idea these lads didn't want us to go there.

And right on top of that, it all hooked up to our being checked on our way to Garth's and the picture that hadn't been entirely out of my mind since I'd seen it; the sight of that lad in Garth's office, with the knife hole in his back, the bills in his hands and Cass calling it murder. And I hadn't been standing still all this time, mulling things over. My hands were busy, but my stuff was getting mechanical and I'd taken a jab or two; but when all this hit me, I guess I just blew my top.

It was a fool thing to do, with that big cat weaving back and forth, trying to pick me out from the other fellow, but I was too steamed up to be careful, and the one-two I let go slammed the guy over the running board and socked his head against the car. Then I did have sense enough to duck fast, and the slug missed me from four feet away. That was the first shot, and I was just beginning to think about the second one when something exploded behind me and glass from the window was flying everywhere with the guy and his gat ducked out of sight.

"Get around here, kid!" Dutch was yelling, but I was already sliding off the bumper when he let another one go.

I kept humped down and got around as far as Dutch's door when I heard the other car getting up steam. I took a quick look and saw it pulling out with a couple of lads doing a fast loading job with the two babies I'd put to sleep. I ran around front to my seat while Dutch was putting away his popgun and getting the engine going, but by the time he had swung around, the other car was showing red as it took the first corner on a skid.

"Think we ought to get 'em, kid?" Dutch asked.

"Better get where we were going, fast," I told him, trying to do a Cass Manning and dope this all out

but I couldn't make first on it. Then Dutch wanted to know all about it, and I was just going to tell him to shut up and let me think, but I yelled something else.

We were crossing an intersection, the second after we'd turned, and I saw a car coming down on us from the street on the right. Maybe it was doing fifty; maybe it was doing a hundred. It wouldn't have made any difference if they'd hit us where they were pointing. I guess what Dutch saw sort of made him jump, and his foot hit the pedal before he knew it. Anyway, it seemed to me the coupé sprang about six feet with Dutch twisting her nose around. I saw the other car scrape the curb on the corner and I heard their fender tickle our rear bumper, then they were across the main drag like a scared cat, but not before I'd seen it was the same car that had tried to curb us, as they say on Park Avenue. Then I saw them slow down and I saw the flashes as lead drummed against our tin side.

"Let's settle 'em this time," Dutch yelled, yanking the wheel around, but I grabbed his arm.

"Beat it for Phillips!" I yelled at him. "Can't you see they trying to keep us away?" And I pulled his arm straight.

"Yeah? Who th' hell are they, then?" But Dutch was obeying orders, and we burned the next few blocks.

"See if they're still chasing," I hollered at him from the steps. "Then come up."

I burst through the big plate glass and grilled door into a bunch of dignified quiet. A big, solemn fellow in blue and brass ruffled up to me. He acted as though it wasn't polite to speak out loud.

"Phillips' apartment," I yapped at him.

Instead of answering, he was looking my map over, but I hadn't had time to think about the slamming it had taken, and I didn't have any then. I put my right against his shoulder and pivoted him around.

"Start running," I told him. "This is the law."

"But . . . but Mr. Phillips is not at home." He'd got his mouth open at last, but his feet were dragging as I pulled him along.

"Don't be funny," I said. "We're going to see."

And Mr. Phillips was at home; in the big, luxurious living room with the shades half drawn and the place seeming even quieter than downstairs. Then I saw the reason for that. A stout, gray-haired man was lying half on a couch and half on the floor, and the handle of the knife in his chest told the rest. I heard a yawp behind me, but I caught the big bluecoat before he could get out or faint or whatever he was going to do. I put him in a chair and told him his job was to stick right there. Then I jumped for a phone and put in a call for Cass, and got him as quick as if he'd been waiting for it.

I gave him the news and he said: "Wait!" And I could see him telling somebody off to get the boys up here fast. Then he had me begin from the start.

"Did the elevator boy tell you if he had given the message to Garth before he told you?" he asked.

"I thought you had that baby tucked in, so why should I ask?"

"Which means you didn't. All right. Take five minutes to look things over, leave the sergeant and meet me two blocks up from Garth's apartment."

I hung up. I was looking sort of absent-mindedly at the bluecoat's face and thinking of all the screwy ideas this one of Cass' took first money, when something about that face got me to thinking of something else. It wasn't solemn any more. The mouth was wide open and it wasn't letting out anything except air and perhaps not even that; and the eyes looked as if they were trying to get wider open than the mouth. If it had been a mirror I might have had better luck. Anyway I started to turn when somebody back there said. "Don't!"

The tone told me that maybe if I behaved I wouldn't get hurt, but if I didn't—and the voice was that of Al Garth. Back in his place I'd got a pretty good idea that this guy Garth, if he said anything, he meant exactly that and no fooling. He was that kind of a bird. But there'd been a call for him alone to come to Phillips, and Phillips was dead, and here was Garth. Then there were those guys outside who'd tried the best they knew to keep us away from here, which made them Garth's men on the watch while he did the job. Then the whole damned mess

went screwy on me, and I guess I groaned, for Garth spoke again.

"You haven't been hurt, yet, big boy," and he made it sarcastic, and that made me mad.

I did a flop, came up on one knee, and this time I remembered I had a gun and was reaching it. Then I looked into a little round, black hole and stopped reaching. I don't believe I ever saw a gun held so steady, unless it was in Cass' hand, and that guy is ice. Garth was between Phillips' body and a door, and it looked to me as if he had just come from the body and was heading for the door.

"Put your hands up," he said, and I had to.

"This won't buy you anything, Garth," I told him.

"It might if I bumped you two off!" he snapped. "Now shut up." He went smoothly to the door, and the last thing I saw was that little round muzzle, then the door closed and I heard a lock click. I spent the next thirty seconds running up against locked doors and I guess I tried all there were in that apartment. I bounced back into the living room.

Bluecoat was standing by his chair, flopping his hands.

"I bet you were a general in the Russian army," I snarled at him, and he says. "Yes, sir; yes, sir. I was."

"Then you ought to know if there's a back way out of this joint."

"There is, sir," he said as if he had made a sudden discovery. "To the other street; and do you know, sir, that must have been the way by which Mr. Phillips came in, by way of the garages, sir. I really believed him still in Florida."

"Ever see this other bird before?" I asked him, busy with a window.

"If you refer to the gentleman with the pistol," he said reprovingly, "he called upon Mr. Phillips one evening three weeks ago."

"What was Phillips' business?"

"He was a banker, or some such sort of financier, and a very wealthy one."

And then there was a big noise on the stairs and in the corridor, and Dutch came boiling in with a couple, three men from the precinct. I whoaed them down before they could muss anything, told them that headquarters was sending a crew, and gave Dutch the word to watch things and hand over the car keys. I guess I'd wasted about three minutes out of my five and spent two more trying to see something I could tell Cass about. That's how I happened to see the pad on a table desk with "Garth, 5, 50" scribbled on it in pencil. Well, that meant as much to me as anything else in this dipsy-doodle, and I tucked it into my mind to give Cass.

I was just turning away when I thought of something.

"How'd you happen to get in on this?" I asked one of the precinct boys.

"Phone call, dial, coudn't trace."

No one seemed to care whether I went away from there or not, at least I didn't meet any cars trying to smash me, and I had nothing to do as I drove over except to chew over all the fat that had been put on the fire in the past few hours, but it was nothing but a smoke for all I could make out of it. I carried the grouch to Cass, after I'd tucked the car in an alley opening and found him waiting so still in a shadow of a building that I almost bumped into him.

"It seems almost too simple, kid," was the sort of encouragement he gave me. "That's why I want a very

plain exhibition of the real facts."

"Yeah, I kind of got that idea, too," I said brightly. "Garth, with tickets all ready for his hop, gets his men to tie up the gal and bump her brother while he gives the works to

Phillips. That seems to me a pretty busy afternoon for one guy. It looks lucky that you spotted those ducats or he'd have slipped off and left the bag hanging. I suppose you let him out so he'd show his trail. We ought to have him by morning."

CHAPTER IV.

GARTH TALKS.

Cass looked at me as if he was proud of me or marveled at me, or something like that, so I thought I'd done well enough and clammed.

We got in quietly and went upstairs. Cass pressed the buzzer and the door opened a crack on darkness. After a moment it went wide, and I stretched my neck when Al Garth looked out at us.

"We're coming in," Cass said.

"Unless you've got a warrant you're not," Garth said, and it was mean and hard. Or was it desperate?

"I have two papers," Cass told him. "Want to make it the hard way?"

"Oh, come on in," Garth said.

I followed Cass in and had my eyes open, waiting for Cass to produce the nippers. But he went on right past Garth into a big room where a single shaded light was burning. I still couldn't get it, and I kept my eyes on Garth until I saw Cass poking at the curtains that hung over or three doorways leading from the room. Then he swung one wide, and I saw the chair that didn't seem to have any business in a corridor. Cass looked at Garth and Garth went over, with me behind him.

Cass didn't say nothing, just looked, and while everyone was dumb, another curtain swung open and the stunning-looking gal I'd last seen dead to the world in the bedroom walked straight into the room. And she didn't seem to see us at all, and she didn't seem to be looking at anything. From the side I could see that her cheeks were wet, and she looked as if the world had gone to pieces on her.

"It's all right, Bert," she said in a dreary, weary voice. "Please be careful."

I glanced at Cass and saw a glint come into his eyes as he watched Garth.

"Take it easy, Leona," Garth said to the girl, stepped to her and led her to a chair. Then he came over to us.

"All right, Garth," Cass said suddenly. "I'll play it up to a certain point."

Garth nodded, as if that didn't make very much difference to him. He nodded to another doorway and Cass gave me the nod to come with him. I guess I was dumb, but what the hell; Cass was the boss. We slid behind our curtain, Cass taking one side and I the other, and as I peered through I missed Al Garth. The girl was alone in the room. She was trying bravely, but she simply couldn't seem to keep her head up.

Then, I don't know how many minutes had passed, there came a soft buzzer, and that appeared to bring her to life. She shook her head, wiped her hand hard across her eyes and stood up, and for the moment she seemed another girl altogether. She walked steadily across the room, disappeared for a second, then backed into the room, and I drew my breath when I saw that she was actually smiling.

A man was coming in after her and I tore my eyes from the girl. The fellow who followed her was watching her like a hawk, a sort of triumphant grin twisting his lips and his eyes as bright as a ferret's.

"Come on, Cleve," she said. "I feel terribly. It is so awful that I cannot think straight at all. It was bad enough about Tom, but if that wasn't enough—"

"I know, Leona," Cleve Stiles said, "and that's why I want to take you away from the whole mess. We'll go tonight; just as soon as you are ready."

"But isn't there any chance . . . that . . . Bert—" she faltered.

"Not a chance in the world," Cleve said, as if it didn't make him feel too bad. "Listen; they've pinched Garth as an accessory fof killing your brother, and they'll put the goods on him. I'm glad you saw what he is before it was too late. And that's nothing. Listen." Stiles was getting excited. "And this is good. While they have him safe in the hoosegow, they've just found out that Garth had put the knife into Phillips, the man who was willing to pull him out of his hole."

Stiles was watching the girl so closely he failed to see what had caught my eye. The curtain of another doorway had stirred, and now Garth had slipped quietly into the room. And still Cleve Stiles hadn't seen him. Garth was standing easily, his hands at his sides.

"Just how did you know about Phillips?" Garth asked in that steel-cold voice of his.

Stiles jumped about a foot. He

had an answer for that, and I guess it was the only answer he had.

His right hand streaked to his hip and a gun flashed.

Then a pistol cracked close beside me. I saw Stiles' arm go down and the gun slip to the floor.

"Hold it, Garth!" Cass snapped, and stepped out in the clear.

I hadn't seen him do it, but Garth had a gun in his hand. He didn't drop it and he didn't tuck it away. He raised it swiftly and let one go across the room. Then three or four men spilled into the room, apparently unable to check their rush, although the first man came in head-first and stumbled to the floor.

A gun roared from the bunch. I didn't see what effect the shot had, for Cass and I both were out there now, and we were busy. I'd picked out a couple of those muggs and I'd seen them not so long before when we'd been throwing fists instead of lead. I guess both Dutch and I are average good when it comes to bruising, but Cass in action is pretty close to a streak of lightning. Anyway, we had that bunch corralled and tamed down in a couple of minutes, and Cass was putting the tie on Cleve Stiles.

Then I saw that Al Garth had slumped into a chair and that the girl, Leona, was hanging over him. Cass came back from the phone and we went over.

"I suppose you'll talk now, Garth," Cass said.

And Garth smiled. Blood was dripping down his shirt front from a point that was high up but not too high. Cass started to take a look at it, but Garth shook his head.

"Wait; let the doc handle it," he said quietly. "Yes, I'll talk now, Manning, although I guess you've got most of the set-up. A guy, who'd fed for years out of my hand, thought he saw a chance when I was in a spot, and he did plenty.

"I needed cash badly for a deal that won't interest you, and Phillips, who had been a good friend for years, came up from Florida to see that I got it." He looked up at Cass, and his eyes got narrow.

"I didn't want to tell you where I was today for several reasons. I wanted to let anyone make out of it what they wanted to until I could get some line on what had happened to Tom. Another reason was that Leona and I had gone out of town to get married secretly because of something that concerns ourselves alone. We were taking the plane for Miami tonight, and there was a lot of ground to be covered in a hurry. I had to get Leona to come here where I'd forgotten the tickets; then I sent Tom to the office and gave him the combination of the safe to get some quick cash."

"What about Phillips?" Cass asked quietly.

"That was my errand," Garth said readily, "and I was on my way there when I got a tip I'd better look in at the office. When you turned me out was my first chance." He glanced at me, then tried to raise a hand toward his pocket, but gave it up. He nodded toward it. "You'll find his check for me in there. He had it in his pocket. Why Stiles left it there was his fool idea of adding another one to trip me."

He stopped for a moment, but if it was from the pain of his wound, his face didn't show it. He looked down, where the blood was oozing steadily. The girl, Leona, was crying softly, holding herself in.

"You can check everything on time, Manning."

Cass nodded.

"You can cover your time all day, Garth?"

"Yes."

"How about the men who tied up your wife here, and those over there?"

"They were all on my pay roll. Stiles must have promised them a slice when he took over."

"How'd you get on to him, Garth?"

"Two things: first, he was the only one outside of Leona who knew a thing about the Phillips' deal and that Phillips was coming north today. The second, which came first, was what you saw yourself."

Cass nodded.

"Well, what was it, cap?" I blurted.

"The act Stiles put on. He couldn't possibly have come by that doorman without knowing what was upstairs. The prints on those bills will settle him for the first killing, but the second may not be so easy."

"There's a knife over there that might help," I suggested.

Cass shook his head, but it was not at what I said.

"They were both stupid, unnecessary and insane murders."

"Most murders are, aren't they, Manning?" Garth asked.

"He must have been mad," Cass said.

"He was—over Leona."

Garth raised his hand this time and patted the girl's arm.

Then the doc led the rest of the crew into the room and took over.

THE END.

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THE DEVIL'S INN

by WILLIAM G. BOGART

Russ Kent could not believe that ghosts of long-dead soldiers returned to fight—but before he finished his case he had to believe even more astounding things than that!

The girl stood a car-length away from Russ Kent on the small, gloomy station platform. Both stood there a moment as the train moved on into the night. A second before, lights from the car windows had illumi-

nated the platform, but now there was only the dismal, pale glow of a single bulb over the doorway to the empty waiting room. No other passengers had left the train; there was no one to meet these two who had stepped down into the breathless quiet of the sleeping country town.

Russ Kent stared around. A small lunchroom across the street was closed. Next to it was a boarded-up livery stable. And that was about all! The remainder of the village street that faced the drab old station was tree-lined and shadowy.

Well, Russ Kent thought, that's what he got for not writing ahead for reservations at the inn. They probably would have sent down a car to meet him.

With a shrug, he bent down, started to pick up his bag—then happened to glance toward the girl. She started toward him, two small bags in her hands, her high heels making sharp clicking sounds on the rough wooden planking. At the same instant, Russ Kent started her way.

He said, "Pardon me, can you tell me—"

And the girl was just saying, "Pardon me, can you—"

They both laughed, the girl apparently with relief.

There had been something taut and frightened about her voice. Russ could understand that. To be dropped off a train at midnight, in a solemn, out-of-the-way hamlet was enough to frighten any young girl.

Smiling, Russ said, "It looks like we're both in the same predicament."

"I figured there would be a taxi or something to meet this train," the girl said.

Russ Kent nodded. "Me, too!" He had a swift glimpse of dark, bright eyes; of soft brown hair—or was it black?—that curled upward beneath a tricky little hat. She was small and dainty and pretty. "I figured the inn would have a car meeting the trains—even if this was the last one in tonight."

The girl's face brightened.

"Are you going there, too?" she asked. "Are you going to the Post Inn?"

There was a hopeful tone about her voice now. A moment before, she had been frightened at the strange loneliness of the town.

Russ nodded again. "This isn't so bad after all," he said, and there was something about his pleasant, tanned features that was reassuring. "Yes, I'm going there for a little vacation. It looks like we'll have to walk, though!"

He picked up one of the girl's bags, offered, "Let me help."

But as they started out, across the shadowy plaza and toward a single main street that led up through the village, the girl asked, puzzled, "But where *is* the place? This is my first trip here—"

Russ said, "I think I can find it. It's about half a mile beyond the village, on the old Post Road. The new parkway runs some distance inland now. You see, they're trying to keep Post Inn exclusive."

"And hard to reach!" the girl laughed.

There was something about walking alone in the quiet night—just the two of them—that brought them close together. Russ learned that her name was Helen Stevens, and he thought she was pretty nice. This trip up here had looked like a dull assignment, but now it suddenly held a promise.

They passed a single short block of scattered stores, then were abruptly beyond the town. A hill climbed up out of the village, then

swung left and dipped down into a hollow.

Russ explained, "Their folder gave brief directions. I think the inn is just north of here."

They followed the dusty road, and soon were moving beneath trees that shadowed the lonely thoroughfare. Misty veils of fog lifted up from the hollow ahead. The fog enveloped Russ Kent and the girl, and the night was suddenly dank and cold. He heard the girl's quick breathing.

Russ suddenly slowed his pace, exclaimed, "Gosh, I'm sorry! It must be tough going in those high heels!"

Helen Stevens had moved closer to him. She said breathlessly, "It would have been quite horrible—walking out to this place alone!"

On their left, a frog croaked dismally in a marshy swamp. The fog grew thicker, and the chill more intense. And then suddenly the road was climbing upward again, and they passed from the clammy gray fog. They climbed steadily for five minutes. Dust puffed out beneath their shoes. The girl was panting.

And then they were moving along an open bit of roadway that dropped slowly down toward the Hudson. Far off, in the distance, lights blinked on a string of barges that were creeping slowly up the river. The mountains—the foothills of the Catskills—rose grimly a little distance inland.

Ahead there seemed to be only the deserted road.

The girl said, "This is the longest half mile I ever—"

She paused, listening. And Russ heard the sound. A car was climbing the hill behind them. It sounded like an old Model T. Russ quickly put down the bags at the edge of the road, stepped out in plain sight and waved down the car, whose lights had already engulfed them.

For a moment it looked as though the machine was going to run them down. Then the driver drew up with a chattering of brakes and stuck his head out the window. He looked like a farmer.

Russ Kent asked, "Look, how far is it to Post Inn?"

The man behind the wheel had gaunt, leathery features and tired-looking eyes. But those eyes suddenly clouded.

"Post Inn!" he exclaimed in a strangely hollow voice. "You ain't going *there?*"

There was something odd about the way the old fellow asked the question. Russ tried to tell himself that it was just surprise because the man had seen a girl and a man on the road, alone, so late at night.

"Sure, we're going there," Russ said. And suddenly he was thinking of the girl, and the punishment her feet must be taking from walking along the uneven road in high heels. "Listen, how about a lift, partner? I'll pay you—"

The farmer jabbed a finger ahead. He said quickly, "It's only a little ways now. Just past the bend. I gotta get home—"

Russ Kent frowned. "Dammit, man!" he snorted. "I said I'd pay you for the ride. There was no taxi at the station—"

"Of course not!" the driver cut in. His voice sounded about ready to crack.

"But why?" Helen Stevens asked. "What's wrong?"

The old fellow gave them both a peculiar stare, was starting to move on.

"Wait!" Russ Kent cried. "What's wrong with this Post Inn? Why don't you want to drive us there?"

The expression on the man's face was suddenly fear-filled. "I'll tell

you why!" he cried shrilly. "The curse returned to Miller's Tavern before they got it half reconstructed! I warned them not to finish the job. But they went ahead, anyway. But nobody'll ever stay there! Not when they find out!"

Helen Stevens had instinctively drawn closer to Russ Kent. Her dark eyes flicked to his eyes questioningly. Then she looked at the car driver again.

"Find out . . . what?" she asked softly.

"About the singing madman!" the farmer snapped. And then, without further word, he sent the car rattling onward into the night. Soon its exhaust was only a faint murmur. Dust settled on the roadway, flecked the suitcase resting there.

Russ Kent looked at the girl. For the first time, he realized that her slim hand was gripping his arm. She was trembling.

"Heavens!" she gasped abruptly. "What was he . . . trying to tell us?"

When Russ bent down to pick up the bags, his face was grim and thoughtful. But as he straightened to face the girl, he was smiling—though he was in no mood to do so. There was something damned queer about the way that old fellow had acted.

He said easily, "Just some hick crackpot. Don't worry about it. Come on."

They started out again.

The girl said, "Did you hear what he said about the curse on Miller's Tavern?" Her voice was worried.

Russ Kent smiled. "Sure, but why worry about it? As long as it has nothing to do with Post Inn—"

"But it has!"

He looked at the girl's white face.

She raced on: "Post Inn *is* Miller's Tavern. Back in the days of the Revolution it was a well-known stagecoach stop along the old Post Road. Years later the old inn fell into decay—why, I don't know. But just recently someone bought the property and rebuilt the old inn. I understand they've made a charming place out of it. And now—"

She looked at Kent. "He mentioned that curse. He called the inn by its old name—Miller's Tavern. What do you imagine he meant?"

They had reached a curve in the road. Russ Kent drew up, motioned with his chin, said brightly, "Well, we'll soon find out. Look over there! I'd say it seems like a very peaceful and lovely place!"

They both gazed at the old-style signpost that hung from a new, white-painted cross-arm just ahead. The sign contained a painting of an old stagecoach, and above the picture was the old-fashioned lettering: POST INN. Below this, the words: "Established 1760."

A side road swung in at the signpost, and far back beneath huge old elms they saw the rambling outlines of a white-painted structure. The road ended in a curving drive before the inn, and at the front entrance an iron lantern glowed feebly in the night.

The girl let out a sigh of relief.

"I guess you're right," she said. "What could be more charming—"

Russ Kent hardly heard her words. His head had turned slightly and he was listening to something else. It had sounded like someone singing, around another bend in the road they had followed. The song knifed through the night, sharp and staccato and shrill!

Russ Kent dropped the bags and frowned. Helen had stopped speaking, swinging to look at him, her eyes frightened. Suddenly, with a

little whimper of fear, she was close to him.

"That farmer," she cried, "said something about a singing . . . madman!"

They both listened tensely. Neither recognized the song, but they both understood its meaning. It was a march, and the words came with a rhythm that reminded one of marching men.

"It's some sort of . . . battle song!" Helen gasped. "But what—"

Abruptly the singing stopped. They had seen no one. Silence again dropped like a shroud over the lonely roadway.

Russ Kent shrugged and tried to force a grin. "It's probably some country Romeo on his way home from a date," he said lightly. "I suppose—"

"Listen!"

Helen's cry sent a chill along his spine. Or perhaps it was the other thing he heard in the same instant.

A woman's stark cry of terror, thin and blood curdling. So high-pitched was the scream that it was difficult to locate the exact source of the sound. Russ Kent jerked around, staring.

The laughter followed. A man's raucous voice, it was, and it seemed to be gloating!

Russ snapped, "There's something damned funny happening down there!" He pointed along the dusty road, gave the girl's arm a quick, reassuring squeeze. "You go on up to the inn. I'm going to take a quick look."

He started running. The weird laughter was still coming from around the bend in the road, though the woman's horrified scream had ended. Whether it had come from the same spot, he was not sure. But at least he'd find out what fool was singing and bellowing like that!

It was a good hundred yards to the bend in the dusty road, and before Russ Kent reached the spot the man's deep, uncanny laughter had stopped. But Russ kept going, leaping around the curve. Trees grew close to the rutted byway; it was hard to see much of anything.

But there *was* something! A vague, bulky form moved somewhere ahead. It seemed to be someone right out there in the middle of the road!

"Hey!" Russ Kent rapped, and plunged ahead. He gave no thought to his own safety. But then, he was like that. Tall and lean and hard, the sort of a man who acted first and asked questions afterward. His jaw set grimly now, and he closed in on the moving figure.

Whoever—or whatever—it was slid toward the brush bordering one side of the road. It streaked toward the nearby trees. Kent had a swift glimpse of what looked like a long coat with tails; of a three-cornered hat and gold braid. And the figure was carrying a sword!

Even as Russ Kent closed in, the man whirled. He was tall and broad-shouldered and powerful. There was the sudden *swish* of metal slicing the air.

Russ dived, went into a long sprawl—and the long sword blade cleared his head by inches. He scrambled to his feet, spun around. In his hand was clutched a heavy rock that his fingers had closed over when he fell.

The uniformed figure was just blending with the dark woods. Russ Kent raised his arm and let the rock fly.

A split second later there was a heavy grunt. Metal spanged as it struck stones. But the man kept running, the sounds of his footsteps almost immediately lost beneath the heavy growth of trees.

Kent barged forward again. Just before he reached the deep line of trees, he almost stumbled over the sword lying beneath his feet.

Double-edged, its blade was a good three feet in length. There was a heavy metal cuplike affair to protect the wielder's hand. A cavalry sword of ancient date!

Russ Kent picked it up, was on the verge of plunging into the woods, when something happened.

Helen's cry—faint and sort of muffled and fear-filled!

He leaped back, the sword still in his hand, and started back toward the inn. He cursed himself for having left her there alone. Perhaps that old farmer hadn't been so whacky after all. There certainly was something damned queer around here!

He reached the point where the drive curved into the Post Inn. He saw someone up near the steps of the rebuilt hotel. Helen! And there was someone else with her!

He dashed forward. And a second later drew up in horror at the sight which met his gaze. Helen and the robe-clad woman who must have come from the hotel, were staring at it, too. It was the thing that had accounted for Helen's scream, Russ knew.

A man's form dangled from a limb of one of the massive elm trees, his gangling, thin body slowly turning like a sack hung on the end of a cord. Only in this case the cord was a heavy rope, and it had been tied in a hangman's knot behind the victim's ear!

But that wasn't all.

Rays from the iron lantern hung on the porch touched the dead body

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as it weirdly circled in the air. The crimson marks showed where something had knifed the man at various parts of his body.

Someone else ran out of the inn. It was a tall, straightly built man of middle age. His hair was steel-gray, and he wore pajamas and a dressing gown.

He looked at the middle-aged, scrawny-looking woman beside Helen.

"Marie," the arrival started to question, "did you hear that singing—"

And then he saw the swaying body. A groan came from the big man's throat.

"Another one!" he breathed. He looked at the two women. But their eyes were not on the hanging corpse —but on Russ Kent. The big man's gaze followed their horrified stares.

"Russ!" Helen cried. Her tone said that though they'd been perfect strangers a scant half hour ago, this situation had now thrown them very close together. Her wide staring eyes went from the sword to his face, and held there. "Oh, Russ!" she said.

He looked down, and it was then he saw what had held her rigid with horror.

Blood still dripped from the sword which he held in his hand.

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE DANGER.

While Russ Kent's cool gray eyes stared at the gruesome object in his right hand, his lean jaw set like blocky granite. He looked at the gray-haired man who had run from the inn.

"I think," Kent said sharply, "you'd better explain about this . . . this horror!" He indicated the corpse.

The tall man gave him a suspicious stare.

"You might explain about *yourself!*" he said.

Russ indicated Helen Stevens, explained briefly. "We came here as guests! Miss Stevens already has a reservation. A fine service you have. No one to meet the train—"

With a gasp of dismay, the big man moved forward. He quickly took hold of the traveling bag which Helen Stevens was still clutching in her trembling hands.

He said, "Peters"—he indicated the dangling corpse—"is—was our handy man here. Ordinarily, he would have met that midnight train. But now—" He gave a swift glance at the corpse, motioned them toward the porch steps. "If you'll come inside—"

For a moment, the girl hesitated. But Russ Kent said, "We've got to put up *some* place." His eyes flickered grimly. "And there's a few things that need explaining."

He touched Helen's arm. "Come on."

They learned that the big gray-haired man was named Walsh, and he was the manager here at Post Inn. The thin, tall woman who had been there with Helen was Marie LaCross, housekeeper of the hostelry.

Inside the building they crossed a huge living room furnished with antiques. A massive, ancient fireplace took up almost the entire side wall of the room. Embers of a log fire still glowed on the hearth.

There was a clerk's desk near the archway from the hall, and the manager headed there first. He said, "I'll call the sheriff. I'll have him take care of . . . of what's outside."

Marie, the color of her thin cheeks an ash-gray, looked at Russ Kent and the girl. She said tensely, "This . . . trouble started right after we

opened! It's something horrible! They say it's the ghost of a former army—"

From the desk, gray-haired Walsh spoke sharply. "Marie! Will you cut out that nonsense?"

The manager was rattling the hook on the phone. Finally he slammed up the receiver impatiently, came back across the room, explained, "I was talking to the sheriff just an hour ago. He was going to drop out here tonight, but there's been a bad accident out on the Parkway. They've got every available trooper and deputy out there. And now that line's dead!"

Russ listened quietly. Then he made a motion toward the windows, prompted, "What is this about a singing maniac and—" He looked at the waxen-faced housekeeper. "And a ghost?"

Big Walsh spread his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"I say it's nonsense!" he explained. "A silly story that some of the natives around here have started. Peters got drunk a couple of weeks ago and was in a fight in town. I have an idea the fellow he beat up held a grudge, and so he killed—"

"Why don't you tell them about the curse?" said Marie. Her black, deep eyes held a wild stare.

Walsh sighed. Some of the ramrod straightness of his alert figure seemed to slip from him. Now he looked like a tired, middle-aged man.

"All right," he said resignedly. "You see, when this place was a famous coach stop during Revolutionary times, there was a British army officer named Captain Billings. There was quite a love affair between him and a girl who lived in this very inn. Her father owned the place. On the eve of the officer's marriage to the Miller girl, she eloped with another man."

"Nice girl!" commented Kent. He glanced at Helen Stevens. But her face was strained as she listened to the story. She was still holding his arm.

"Well," continued the manager, "this fellow she married was a distant cousin, also named Miller. In time, he came into possession of this place. For a number of years it was called Miller's Tavern. Then, one night, they found Josephine Miller murdered!"

"How awful!" Helen Stevens cried.

Walsh nodded. "And they located her murderer—the army captain whom she had jilted. He had cracked up."

"You mean—he was insane?" Kent prodded.

"Yes. They found him roaming the woods, singing battle songs that his own men had often sung while on the march. He was raving mad. He killed himself before they could put him away in some sort of institution."

For a moment, there was silence in the big room. Somewhere out in the hallway an ancient hall clock ticked monotonously.

Marie's thin voice shocked them back to realities.

"And they say," she rasped, "the ghost of Captain Billings still haunts this section! He goes around carrying his cavalry sword, and singing as he roams the woods—"

The woman's intense eyes wavered to the sword still held in Kent's hand. For a moment, he had forgotten about it. Now he swiftly moved to the fireplace and rested it against the big stones.

He told them about the man in uniform he had chased down the road.

Marie gasped. "Was he . . .

wearing a Revolutionary uniform?"

Russ Kent gave a start. He remembered the coat with tails, the tricornered hat. He nodded.

The scrawny housekeeper gave Walsh a triumphant look. "You see!" she snapped. "I told you—"

"Bosh!" said the inn manager. Then he motioned toward the desk. "Miss Stevens, I have a room ready for you. I got your reservation. So if you'll register, Marie will take you upstairs—"

He turned back, looked at Russ Kent, spoke softly, "I wonder if you'll give me a hand until the sheriff can get here? There's a couple of other men in the house. I'll get them—"

Even as Walsh started toward the center hallway, there was the sound of someone coming down the stairs from above. Kent followed after the inn manager.

It was a man clad in a hunting outfit. He wore a khaki jacket that contained innumerable large pockets, expensive khaki breeches, knee-length leather boots and a heavy flannel shirt. Attached to the jacket were a hunting badge, a rabbit's foot, a compass dangling from a silver chain, and one of the wooden whistles used for decoying ducks. The whistle was also hooked to a chain. And there was a metal four-leaf clover pinned over one pocket.

He had close-cropped blond hair and must have been in his thirties. Walsh introduced the two men, and Russ Kent learned that the would-be hunter's name was Townsend. Small eyes blinked from behind thick-lensed glasses, and gave Townsend a pop-eyed appearance. It was Kent's impression that Townsend would probably jump a mile if anyone so much as fired a shotgun near him!

The men stepped outside.

"Wait a minute," Walsh requested, and moved off toward the rear of the rambling building. He called back, "I'll get Andrew."

Russ said, "Who's Andrew?"

Townsend's eyes flickered behind his heavy glasses. "He's the stableman. You see, they keep some fine riding horses here for the guests." Kent guessed that some ambitious sporting-goods-store salesman had sold Townsend everything in the catalogue. Townsend stared curiously at Russ Kent. "Are you a new guest?"

Russ nodded.

"Then there's something I ought to tell you." The man sounded scared. "There's something awful happening here—"

Kent said, "As I've already found out!" He motioned toward the elm tree diagonally across from the porch. "That, for instance!"

Townsend had not seen the hanging corpse—at first. Now his hands fluttered to his mouth.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Another!"

Russ Kent's eyes narrowed. "That's what Walsh said. Another. What do you mean?"

"The first week they opened here—about two weeks ago—a workman was found murdered, stabbed to death with a sword!" The man in hunting clothes motioned toward the grim-looking corpse. "Just like that one!"

"And they found no clues?"

"No."

Walsh and another man appeared around the corner of the inn. The newcomer was a burly fellow with a heavy beard and a limp to his walk. He had bristly-looking straw-colored hair and massive arms. He was carrying a stepladder.

The task of taking down the hang-

ing corpse was not pleasant. Walsh directed that it be taken out to the barn. As he explained, "I'll keep trying to get the sheriff. He'll know what to do. Besides, we'll have to stay here with the women."

As soon as Russ Kent could get away, he returned inside. He located Helen in a small cocktail lounge that had been built off a dining room at one end of the building. Two drinks were set up on the bar.

She said tremulously, "I couldn't think of sleeping—yet. I ordered you a drink."

"I need one," said Russ.

The room was cozy. A fire still crackled in a small hearth built into a corner of the room. Old pewter and ancient blue chinaware lined a Dutch shelf built high around the paneled walls of the room. There was a spinning wheel and old ale tankards and a pair of ancient rifles.

A colorful place, under any other conditions, Kent thought. But now as he studied Helen's face he thought of his encounter with the figure in old army officer's clothes, and the sword which had been dropped—and the dead man hanging from a tree.

Helen must have read his thoughts. She said quietly. "It was Marie who screamed just after we heard that . . . man singing. The poor woman's on the verge of collapse. After she showed me to my room, and fixed these drinks, I told her to get to bed. I thought, with you here—"

She gave Russ a somber, steady regard. She looked tired, he thought.

"You'd better get to bed," he suggested.

Helen nodded, put down her glass and led the way toward the stairway. "Your room is near mine," she said. "I was so nervous that I asked Marie—"

He held her arm as they started up the stairs. "I understand," Russ murmured.

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He bade her good night, entered the room which Helen pointed out to him. There was a huge four-poster bed, and old water colors on the walls, and comfortable antique furniture. But he hardly noticed. He sat down on the edge of the bed and his eyes were thoughtful.

And after a while he became aware of voices talking somewhere. But not outside. He stepped quietly to the hall door, first snapping out his room light. He listened.

They were men's voices, but it seemed impossible to locate the source of the sound. He stepped quietly out into the hallway and tiptoed toward the farther end of the hall. It was dark down here.

But he could not hear the voices.

Puzzled, Russ moved back along the length of the hall. He *knew* he could hear the voices, but he could not locate them. It was as elusive a thing as children whispering in the dark of night.

Near his room the sound was more distinct. And yet he could make out no definite conversation.

Russ went back into his room, closed the door, and then quietly raised the window and peered outside.

Nothing moved in the quiet night. He saw no one.

But as he moved back into his room, he heard a door open; then, after a moment, close very quietly. He quickly stepped across to the hall door, opened it carefully, peered out.

Townsend, the prospective hunter, was just disappearing down the flight of stairs to the main floor. And the man was wearing a long raincoat. Kent stared.

At the same time, he became aware that a card hanging from a small knocker on the door directly across the hall from his own was swaying gently. A card that read: "Please Do Not Disturb."

Townsend's room! The room that had just opened and closed!

Russ stepped swiftly across the hallway, tried the doorknob, found the room unlocked. He slipped inside.

A light was turned on in the room, and across the counterpane of the bed was flung Townsend's decorated hunting jacket. Russ Kent's sharp eyes searched the room.

There was a diary on the dresser—

Just out of curiosity he picked it up, started to flip through the pages. Behind him, someone moved.

He spun.

It was Helen.

A silken robe molded her trim, shapely form. Her soft cheeks were flushed with excitement. She gasped, "Russ!" What in the world—"

Then her wide eyes went to the pages beneath his fingers. She stared at the jumble of words. She said, "It looks like a diary, but it doesn't make sense! What is it?"

Russ was suddenly pressing the book into Helen's cold hand. He said quickly, "Wait in your room. Lock the door. There's something I want to do!"

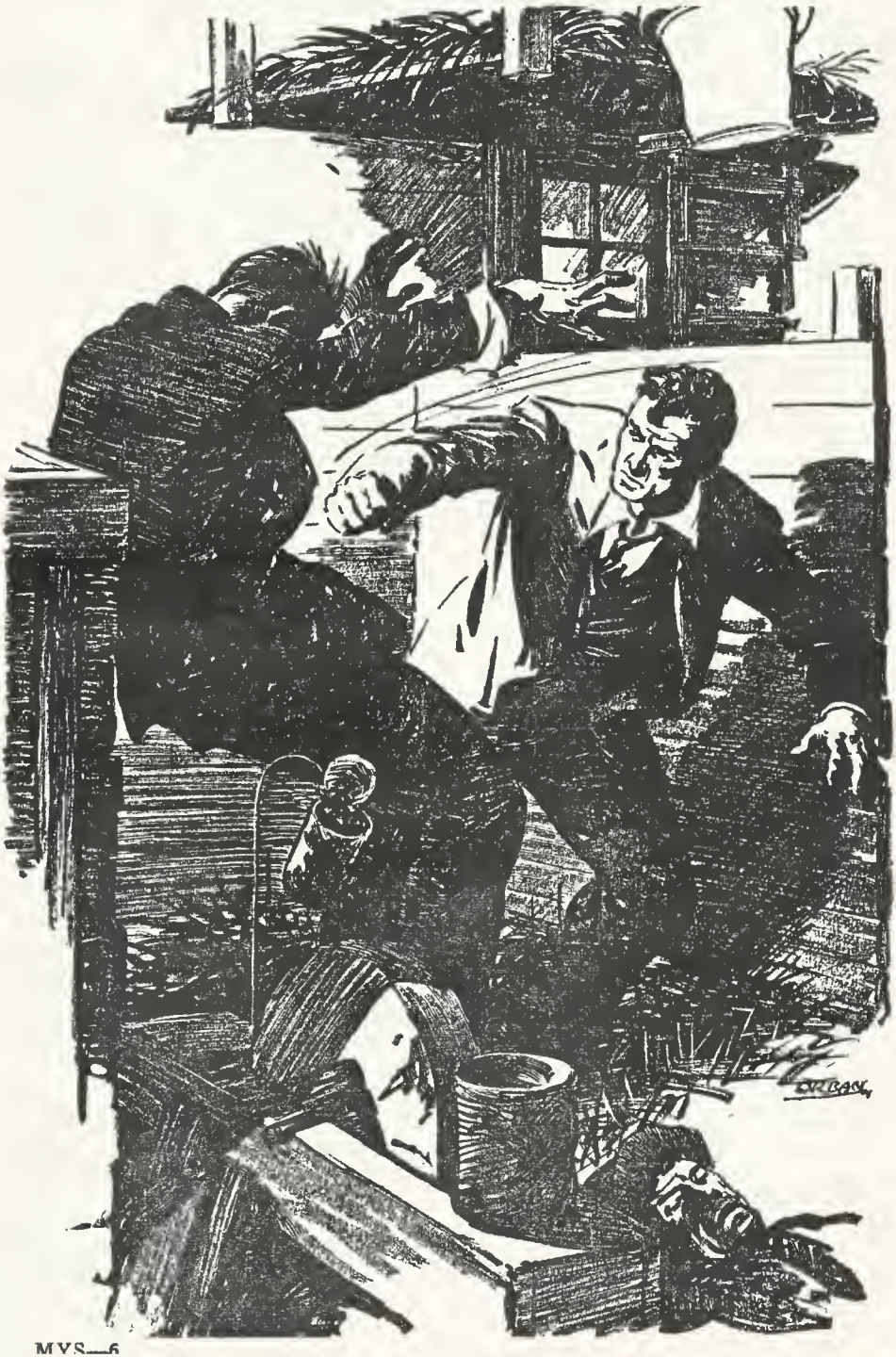
He urged her hurriedly from the room, closed the door, pressed her hand as he left her at her own doorway. "I'll be back," he said, and went quietly down the stairs.

Lights on the lower floor had been turned off now. Only a very vague glow came from the fireplace in the big living room. But it was enough to give some light. It was enough to reveal something.

The sword that Russ Kent had rested there was gone!

He moved soundlessly through the lower-floor rooms. He saw no one. And so he stepped outside into the

Russ Kent's right fist flicked outward and staggered the man with a terrific smash to the jaw!



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APRIL

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

night. He wondered if Townsend could have gone back to the stables.

Kent was just headed that way when he heard something that brought him up short, pressing close to a big elm in order to keep from being seen.

Someone was moving through the trees beyond a broad lawn that faced the remodeled building. There came the single crackling of a twig, the scuff of a shoe against dirt. Russ Kent stiffened. Who was out there in the gloom?

Keeping to the cover of the heavy tree trunks, he started forward.

A man's shadowy figure emerged from the fringe of trees and started toward the stables at the rear of the hotel. Russ Kent stared.

Because a limp, human figure was being carried across the prowler's shoulders!

Keeping to the shadows cast by the walls of the inn, Russ ran in a crouch, following his quarry. He saw the man swing open a door of the stable, disappear inside. Russ Kent waited a moment.

Then he cut across the lawn, reached the barn, pressed against the door and listened. He heard nothing. Carefully he lifted the latch and pushed inside, closing the door soundlessly behind him.

Something hit him with the force of a battering ram.

Kent was knocked to his knees. But he managed to jerk to his feet, twist, meet the onrush of the heavy figure that was flying at him again.

Breath exploded from his lungs as he was driven up against the solid bulwark of a horse's stall. Powerful hands grappled for his throat.

Kent's knee whipped up, caught his attacker in the stomach and partially doubled him forward. At the same instant, Russ Kent's right fist flicked outward and caught the man beneath the jaw.

With a grunt of pain, the fellow staggered backward.

Somewhere in the depths of the stable a lantern glowed feebly. There was just enough trace of light to reveal the burly figure crouched for another attack. And nearby—there was something else.

The limp, apparently lifeless figure that the man had been carrying!

Russ Kent cleared the prone thing in a bound, dived toward his quarry.

But the man moved swiftly. He leaped down the aisleway between the rows of stalls, gained a ladder that led straight upward, disappeared into a loft of the building.

Kent followed.

Dry hay brushed his face as he reached the top of the ladder. He heard the rustle of the stuff off to his right—and moved that way, his shoes slipping as he dug through the deep pile.

And then, suddenly, the world seemed to fall away beneath him and he plunged through space. Too late, he realized the trick. He had been cleverly drawn to one of the open chutes that led down to the stalls!

He landed flat on his back, half stunned. Luckily, though, some straw had broken his fall. But he sensed a new danger as he scrambled to his feet.

A horse whinned in the very stall into which he had fallen. Rear hoofs lashed out and thudded the heavy boards.

Russ Kent pressed close against the walls of the stall, worked his way around the excited horse, at the same time feeling for the door latch with his fingers.

Again the horse kicked out, missing his body by inches. Kent was forced to move slowly, carefully.

Finally he felt the heavy catch. He was outside in a moment, slamming the door behind him.

And somewhere outside the stable he heard running steps fading into the night. His man had got away!

But that wasn't all. The thing that he had suspected was a corpse—which the fellow had carried into the barn—was gone, too!

Could it have been the body of the handy man, Peters, whom they had cut down from the tree? There was one way to find out.

They had brought the man into this very stable, placed him on a feed box down at the far end. Russ Kent hurried that way. The spot was where the lantern was hanging.

And the corpse was there, its hideously sword-stabbed body still freshly gruesome.

Russ whirled back through the aisleway. Who could the second man have been? And had he been dead or merely unconscious?

There was only one answer. He had to find the man who had escaped from the stable. Russ Kent flung outside into the quiet night.

And almost as his feet cleared the threshold, he heard the singing. Each word emphasized the steady and monotonous beat—reminding him of the tramping of marching men! The singing madman!

Even as he drew up short, listening, the voice seemed to fade gradually, as though a curtain were being drawn around the weird performer.

The thing that followed sent fingers of ice crawling over Russ Kent's taut body.

It was the terrible, frantic scream of a girl, keening through the night.

Helen!

CHAPTER III.

DEATH IN THE NIGHT.

The cry came from the inn itself, and apparently from the upstairs floor. Russ Kent spun that way and dashed across the smooth lawn—in time to see a figure pass a window

that was now lighted.

It was the man in a Revolutionary officer's uniform!

For a wild instant, Russ thought of Marie's story of the crazed captain who had returned to murder his former sweetheart.

He reached the porch, slammed through the hallway and took the stairs three at a time. He thought he heard a scuffing somewhere in the second-floor hallway, the faint sound of a girl's muffled sob of terror.

He turned down the corridor—and saw no one! He paused beside the door close to his own, knocked once.

"Helen?" he queried tensely.

There was no response.

He pushed open the door, stared inside. Helen's room was deserted. The lights were on. And he knew that it was in this room that he had seen the man in uniform moving!

He dashed out into the hall again, started whipping open doors up and down the hall. There was his own, and the would-be hunter's—Townsend's—and several others that showed signs of occupancy. But no one was there.

In two moments he discovered that no one was on the second floor at all!

Puzzled, his jaw set grimly, Russ Kent raced back to the first floor and through the rooms down there. But it was the same as upstairs. The entire place was deserted!

And yet—he had not seen Helen or the man in uniform leave the inn!

At the same time, Russ remembered the voices he had heard talking, sort of muffled, from near his room upstairs. Funny about that. *Someone* had been up there just a few moments ago! But where?

And he thought of something else. Walsh, the inn manager, saying the phone was dead. Russ Kent took a moment to hurry toward the desk new. He lifted the receiver.

Almost immediately, the girl operator on the rural line said, "Hello?"

Russ Kent spoke briefly, swiftly. Then he slammed up the receiver and ran toward the stairs again. He skidded to a halt at a spot approximately near where he had heard the mumbling voices awhile ago.

The only thing near him was the open doorway of his own room—and that of Townsend, across the hall! He leaped into the other man's room.

The fancy hunting coat was still on the bed. The lights were on. Russ Kent stared around, frowned.

He moved the bed, the dresser, chairs. He pulled back the rug. His gaze met only bare, solid boards.

A closet door stood partially open across the room. He jumped that way and started pushing clothes aside within the closet. He got down on his knees and felt around the flooring. His head bumped a rear wall—and made a distinct hollow sound, as though space behind the rear wall of the closet were open!

Frantically, Russ Kent's trembling fingers searched along the wall. He located the latch, pushed, and almost went headlong into the stairway that was behind the partition!

There was light glow from the foot of the stairs. He was on the verge of plunging down the steps when he remembered his gun, back in the traveling bag in his own room. He took ten seconds to race back and get it.

Then, the weapon in his hard fist, he headed down the spiral flight of steel steps. And stood amazed when he reached the bottom., which must have been at a point well underneath the inn.

There was a room here, a com-

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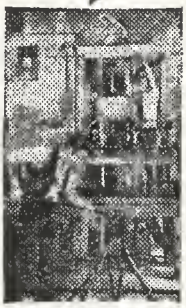

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fortably furnished room. A drop light hung from the ceiling, and beneath this was a large table on which was spread a huge map.

Russ Kent looked at that map and his eyes sharpened. There were points marked on the map that were not far from this very locality. West Point! Iona Island, just off Bear Mountain—the ammunition base for the United States government. Right now, Kent knew that Iona Island was under heavy military guard, its shops working night and day in the manufacture of ammunition.

And farther up the river, almost directly in line with this inn, another island marked on the map. A storage base for high-powered explosives!

Russ Kent thought of Walsh, the manager of Post Inn, and his statement that the phone had been dead. Russ was certain now. Walsh was a spy!

But this other thing—a singing madman; weird murders that had no logical explanation. What was the connection?

There was no time to ponder on that now. Helen must have been brought down here and taken some place.

He looked around, saw the passageway that angled from one side of the room. And the passageway was lighted!

Kent raced into the tunnel.

His eyes were alert for any movement ahead. As he ran, Kent noted that the tunnel slanted slightly downward. Shortly a dampness engulfed him. Ahead, around the glowing electric bulbs placed at intervals along the tunnel, hazy mist clung to the lights and gave them a saffron hue. There was the dank smell of earth, and of the river.

He recalled that in days gone by there had been many old mine tunnels in this vicinty. They said that even in the days of the Revolution the tunnels had been used as secret routes!

Suddenly wet fog touched Kent's tanned features. He realized that he must be almost at the tunnel mouth. He slowed, moved cautiously forward, the .38 held ready in his fist.

And then he was out in the night again, almost directly at the river's edge. The tunnel ended on a small finger of land that jutted out from the shore, a point well hidden. Brush, now pushed aside, cleverly hid the tunnel entrance from the river!

And not fifty yards away, a fast-looking speedboat was drawn up in shallow water, its powerful engine making a soft, steady pur in the damp night. Men were loading something into the boat. Boxes of something that looked like dynamite!

Russ Kent crept forward, keeping against tall brush that bordered the shore line. Something else was being placed aboard the boat. A man's limp form.

A lantern flashed, and Kent got a look at the victim's face. It was Walsh, the manager of the inn!

Someone spoke. "He's croaked, but we'll throw him on the barge, anyway. He'll be blown to hell and gone, and no one'll ever know the difference."

Russ Kent stiffened. What the hell! If Walsh was a spy, then why was he a victim of murder?

Another speaker's comment made Russ forget all about that in the next moment.

"Yeah, that'll take care of him and the dame, too!"

Helen! Russ forgot his own safety as he leaped forward. Helen must also be a captive aboard that boat!

A man had climbed out of the long

speedboat, a flashlight in his hand. Its beam circled with his movement —and the white ray picked out Russ Kent.

A man yelled in warning. "Watch out!"

And then guns were blasting in the night.

Russ Kent went into a dive, landed on his belly behind a low boulder. He took swift aim and fired. A man groaned and pitched headfirst into the water.

Slugs ricocheted off the rock that barely protected Russ Kent's body. He hugged the ground and took aim again. This time, the man with the flashlight went down, splashing the water that was knee-deep around him.

Two men were left, one aboard the boat, the other still standing in the water, cursing as he tried to pick off Kent with his thundering gun.

Abruptly the man in the boat yelled, "Come on, Heinkel! We'll miss that barge!"

There was no light now. Only a splashing as the second man must have leaped for the speedboat.

Russ Kent came to his feet, leaped across rocks, hit the water and reached the boat just as its motor speeded up to a thunderous roar.

He pitched over the gunwale even as one man whirled to cover him. He fired. The man screamed and swayed, then doubled up on the floor of the boat.

The second man was at the helm. He spun, a gun in his fist. And then his eyes went wildly to the boxes that were labeled "Dynamite" piled almost directly between him and Russ Kent.

Reversing the gun in his hand, he leaped across the boxes toward Kent. He must have known that Russ wouldn't shoot—because, tied hand and foot, and gagged, was Helen—lying beside the piled-up cases of explosives!

There was a tiny cabin forward, and dim light from inside revealed the man who was leaping at Kent. The fellow wore a long coat with tails, and a sword, and a crazy-looking hat like a Revolutionary army officer's.

For a split second, Russ Kent didn't recognize the man without his phony, thick-lensed glasses. And then he did. It was the erstwhile hunter—Townsend!

The two men struck, and furious action followed. The boat was moving swiftly now, its throttle left wide open. The craft was heading directly out into midstream. And Russ Kent had one swift look at the string of barges, white lights hanging from mastheads, moving slowly up the river. The barges were directly in the speedboat's path.

Russ feinted, slid to one side—then brought up a terrific uppercut. It landed squarely.

Townsend crumped at Kent's feet.

Russ Kent whipped to the steering wheel, closed the throttle, then cut the boat's motor. The craft pitched gently with the movement of the water, drifted. He next spun to aid the girl, lying on the floor.

Russ quickly had her unbound, then was working at the gag in her mouth.

The instant the gag was out of her mouth, Helen cried worriedly, "That woman, Marie— *Look out!*"

Behind Kent, the woman's harsh voice said, "Put your hands up!"

It was Marie.

But not the pallid-faced housekeeper Russ Kent had known back at the hotel. The woman was a blonde

now—she must have been wearing a wig—and instead of eyes that looked tired was cold brilliance and flame. She snapped, "Stand back!"

The gun in her hand was steady. She moved sideways toward the wheel of the boat, stepped on the starter, got the boat in motion again. All the time she kept watching Russ Kent. Her cold eyes did not waver.

Helen was on her feet now, beside Kent. She gasped breathlessly, her eyes on the gun in Marie's hand, "I overheard their plans, Russ! A string of barges have just rounded a curve in the river where that ammunition base is located. The last barge in the tow is directly *above* that island now! They are going to cut that barge loose, throw this dynamite aboard. They've got a time fuse. The barge will be carried by the tide right against that island. The place will be blown to bits!"

Russ nodded, his eyes on the woman at the wheel. There was something about her eyes, some wild, intense light—

She said, "Mein Gott! You've killed him! He was my husband." Her glance had gone momentarily to Townsend, the fake hunter.

Russ Kent stiffened, his fingers tightening on Helen's arm. He had no doubt that if he made the slightest break, he would be shot in cold blood. Helen, too.

He had been studying Marie's face. Now he said suddenly: "I've got you tagged now. You're Anna Seitz. And he"—Russ indicated Townsend—"is your husband. You're both heads in an international spy ring!"

The woman gave a brittle, short laugh. Her eyes flashed oddly. Suddenly she threw over the wheel, pulled down the throttle. The boat swerved, headed downstream at swift speed. And the island—the ammunition and high-explosives base—was directly ahead!

"Yes!" she said. "And now I shall finish the job alone! *We all shall die for my country!*"

Her chin set grimly and she held to the wheel with one hand, her eyes still on the two captives, the gun unwavering.

And then, from out of the night behind them, came the throb of another high-powered boat. A siren whined shrilly. Someone hailed them. A searchlight beam swung across the water.

To Helen, Russ whispered, "State troopers. I called them from the inn!"

And then, even as the spy, Anna Seitz, turned to stare at the onrushing boat, Russ Kent said, "Jump!"

He half dragged Helen with him over the side of the boat.

And it seemed only seconds later that the terrific explosion came from the island that had been a scant quarter mile ahead. Kent, swimming with one hand, aiding Helen with the other, waited for the other, more terrible concussions that would follow.

But they did not come.

Later, when they had been picked up by the troopers, and he had made certain that Helen was all right, Russ said to the officer in charge, "What happened?"

The officer said, "We nailed that boat just before it reached the island. One of our shots must have hit the dynamite. The boat was blown to hell and gone!"

Helen shuddered. One of the troopers had flung his coat around her slim, shapely form. She pressed against Russ Kent.

He said, "We had the tip-off to Walsh, the manager of Post Inn,

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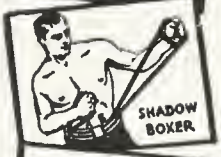

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sometime ago. Walsh was a spy working for a foreign power that has been responsible for plenty of fifth-column activity in this section. We heard they'd bought this old tavern and were working from there. I was sent to investigate."

A man asked, "But why the inn?"

Russ explained, "Because of the underground tunnel that leads directly down here to the river. And because there are some vital arsenals and stuff near here. But those spies will try anything." He pointed downstream. "Recently, an attempt was made to sabotage the Catskill water supply for New York City, that crosses down there at Breakneck Mountain. Spies had entered a valve gate where the water tunnel swings over Breakneck. They were driven off, upriver—and escaped as clean as a whistle. We knew damn well they had a hide-out, and have been trying to find it."

"So that's why they needed Post Inn?"

Kent nodded. "It made a nice blind. All these important government bases are located on the river, and the spies could use a fast boat, do their work, then escape back here to the tunnel."

Helen was staring. She suddenly gasped, "But, Russ, who . . . are *you?*"

He removed the wet card case from his inside pocket. A trooper flashed a light. The card identified Russ Kent as an officer of the F. B. I. He was working out of Washington!

Helen stammered, "But what about the singing madman—and those murders?"

Kent said grimly, "Townsend—posing as a bewildered, novice hunter—and his wife, Anna Seitz, were spies working for a *different* foreign power. Don't you see? They wanted to get Walsh and his crowd out of Post Inn. They wanted to scare everybody off, so they could use the place themselves. It was the only safe spot from which to strike at these arsenals and things nearby. And so they played up that old army captain curse business—and they didn't care who they murdered while doing it!"

Helen suddenly understood. She exclaimed, "Yes, Townsend was a spy. He came back to his room for that diary. He found me with it and grabbed me." Her eyes were wide. "Russ, that book was a—"

"—a *code* book," Russ Kent finished for the girl. "That's what tipped me off to him."

The troopers were suddenly firing a dozen questions. Kent said, "Look, I'm kind of wet." He realized that Helen must be chilled, also. "There's a lot to wind up when we get back to Post Inn. So do you mind waiting until—"

One of the troopers winked, nodded for the others to leave Russ Kent and the girl alone for a moment.

Close to Russ, her dainty, slim figure trembling with the dampness of the river, Helen said softly, "*I* have something to reveal, too!"

He looked at her.

"I wasn't up here on any vacation. I'm a reporter, from the *Times-Commercial,* in New York. I was sent up here to snoop around, but now it seems—" She looked up at him. "It seems all I've learned is to know *you!*"

Russ grinned.

"And what have you found out?"

"I think you're pretty swell!"

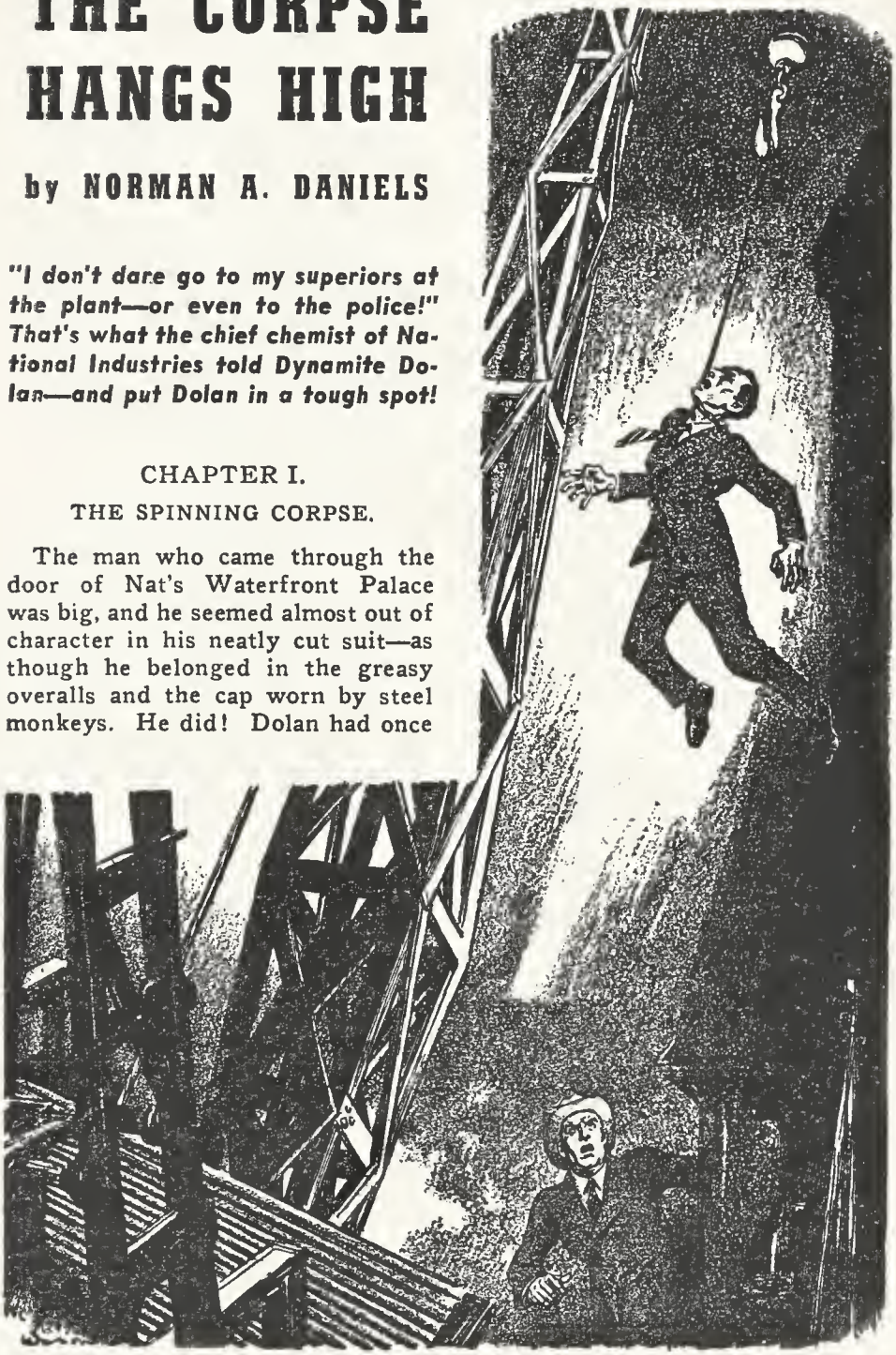
He thought the rest of this job was going to be pretty nice.

THE END

THE CORPSE HANGS HIGH

by NORMAN A. DANIELS

"I don't dare go to my superiors at the plant—or even to the police!" That's what the chief chemist of National Industries told Dynamite Dolan—and put Dolan in a tough spot!



CHAPTER I.

THE SPINNING CORPSE.

The man who came through the door of Nat's Waterfront Palace was big, and he seemed almost out of character in his neatly cut suit—as though he belonged in the greasy overalls and the cap worn by steel monkeys. He did! Dolan had once

been a steelworker. He'd also been a tunnel-digger, a mucker, a section hand. Wherever anything in the way of big construction jobs went on, Dynamite Dolan had been there with his sleeves rolled up, his huge face alight in the eagerness to work.

He'd been given the name of Dynamite early in his career because of the way he could blast. The name stuck, even after National Industries made him their chief trouble shooter.

Dolan walked up to the wet, slightly smelly bar and threw half a dollar on it. He ordered beer, and while it was being drawn he turned around slowly and surveyed the twenty-five or thirty men seated at the tables or strung along the bar. They were mostly all his own breed. Tough, big-muscled and tanned from long hours of work under the sun. The others didn't seem to belong. They were big, too, but with a flabby bigness, and their faces were pale against those of the real steel men, the riveters, the shell and deck gangs.

Dolan got his beer, but he didn't touch it. His eyes roved over the crowd again and he seemed to be looking for someone. Four hours before, Dolan had received a phone call from a man he didn't know. A man who said he was chief chemist of National Industries' mighty shipbuilding yards.

"I don't dare go to the police nor even to my superiors here at the yards, because I'm not sure who I can trust. It's big, Dolan, and you're the only man capable of handling it. I'll meet you in Nat's Waterfront Palace and Café—one of those usual dumps. I'll know you, so just wait."

Dolan had flown three hundred miles to keep the appointment, and wondered if it was going to fizzle out. Gradually he became more and more certain that it wouldn't, for some of the men in the frowzy joint seemed to be gradually converging on him, as though to cut off any possibility of his escaping. Dolan eyed them suspiciously, and received glowering stares in return. They seemed to suspect he was the man they were after—but they weren't positive. Which was all that held them back.

The café door opened ten minutes later, and a slender, well-dressed man entered. He was breathing hard, as though he'd been running. His eyes flashed around the room, centered on Dolan and he started forward. At that moment things happened. Who gave the signal remained a mystery, but the dozen or so men who surrounded Dolan went into action. Apparently a fight started, somehow, and it was being carried in Dolan's direction. He casually set his glass of beer down, pulled his hat a little firmer on his head and, as two struggling men approached him, he reached out, grabbed both by their respective collars and sent them skidding across the room.

The others gave forth howls of rage and charged. Dolan, his back squarely against the bar, was ready. A big smile crossed his face. The first man to approach within his reach flew across the room with his face battered by one mighty punch. The others drew away slightly, and Dolan gave vent to a challenging roar. He wasn't the type to stand and wait for attack. Defense was all right in its place, but with rats like these it was better to take the initiative. He sailed in with fists flying. They gave way for him, and those who didn't move quite fast enough found themselves skidding into a corner and wondering what kind of a pile driver had hammered their noses flat.

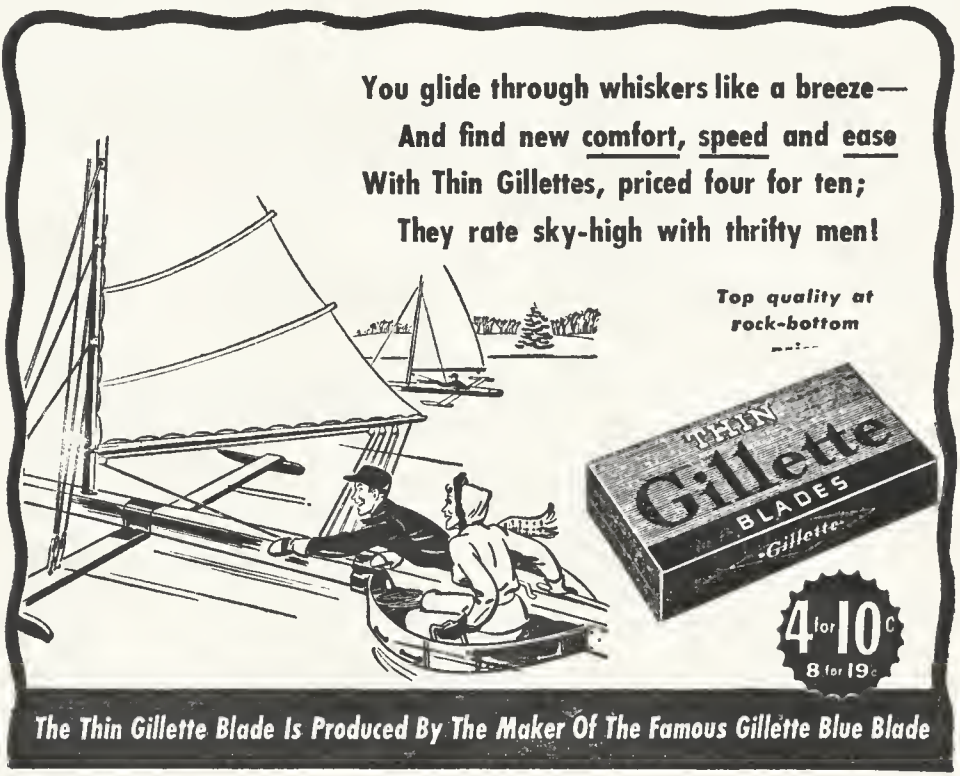
The slender man whose entrance seemed to have signaled the start of the whole affair kept out of the way. Dolan caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of his eye. Two men were stalking the newcomer and one held a knife, half hidden, by his side. Dolan stabbed two hard blows into the paunch of the nearest man, drove the others back and scooped up a chair. He raised this, hurled it with remarkable accuracy, and the man with the knife saw it coming too late. He took the chair full in the chest and fell heavily. His partner yanked a knife of his own out of some hidden scabbard, raised it and leaped toward the slender man.

Dolan leaped, too, and slid his big form between the killer and his victim. The blade started down, but stopped halfway. Bone cracked. The blade fell to the floor, and the killer gave a howl of agony as he tried to get away. Dolan shoved him against the wall, reached the side of the slender man and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"You the guy who sent for me?"

"Yes . . . yes. You're Dolan. The way you fight would prove that, even if I didn't recognize your face. Those men are trying to kill me—kill you, too. We've got to get out of here. No time to lose."

Dolan grunted, and weaved forward slowly. He was completely surrounded by the gang. If he knew their type, they'd soon revert to guns, and then he would be in a bad spot. The other occupants of the place remained disinterested, so far. One or two had started up at the sight of gleaming knives, but they sat down again and waited. Steel-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workers like a good fight, but only ones in which they have a definite interest make them take an actual part.

"You crummy steeljacks!" Dolan roared. "You rivet tossers! I'm Dolan. Dynamite Dolan! Clear a way for me to the door!"

With shouts that made the café shiver, the groups of steelworkers arose. Now it was their fight. Dolan was one of their own kind, and he needed help. The band of thugs seemed dazed by this sudden turn of events, and they started to draw guns. Two wild shots were fired—no more. Within three minutes none of the mob was able to hold a gun, much less use one. Dolan put a protecting arm around the slender man and edged his way toward the door. Two patrolmen burst in, leaving the door wide open. Dolan nudged his companion, and they slipped out into the night. They began running, because the whole neighborhood was becoming alive with sirens and police whistles. Dolan grabbed his companion and pulled him into an alley while two radio cars whizzed by.

"Looks like somebody didn't want us to meet." Dolan wiped his face. "They weren't quite sure of me, and waited for you to show up. Now, what's this all about?"

"I'm Scott Sunderland," his companion panted. "Chief chemist at the shipyards. We're building destroyers—four of 'em. In the last couple of days, something has happened. I'm not sure what, but I have my suspicions. It's sabotage! They're trying to wreck our work on those ships. Not by out-and-out damage, understand, but in cleverer ways. Nobody is wise yet, except me."

"Who's doing it?" Dolan asked gruffly. "And how is it being done?"

"I'm not sure. I'm not sure of anything," Sunderland cried. "That's why I wanted you down here. I don't even know whom to trust. I used the phone in my office to contact you, and someone must have listened, or this . . . this murderous reception would never have been prepared. They didn't want us to meet. They planned to murder us both and do it so the whole thing would be put down as just the work of drunken, brawling water-front men."

Dolan rubbed a tender, swollen lump on his jaw. "Yeah—you're right about that, and I'm in this thing now, so let's have all you know. There must have been a definite reason why you wanted me in such a hurry."

"There is. We'll go to the shipyards. I'll get you by the guards. My idea is that whoever is behind this business will have to get in his work tonight. We'll watch a certain supply shed. I'll tell you all about what I suspect while we're there."

They hurried to the high walls behind which lay one of National Industries' mightiest projects—a shipbuilding yard where some of Uncle Sam's fastest fighting ships were made. Brown-uniformed private guards, armed with rifles, patrolled short beats all around the place. Four of them manned the wide steel gates through which everyone had to pass.

Sunderland was known, and the door opened for him, but a slim, nattily-clad guard with a lieutenant's insignia on his shoulders stopped Dolan.

"It's all right, Braddock," Sunderland explained. "He's a friend of mine and a company man. I'll vouch for him."

"O. K.," the guard lieutenant agreed dubiously. "If you say he's

all right, that lets me out, Mr. Sunderland. You can pass."

Sunderland led Dolan through the yards. Tall, slender derricks, used to lift tons of steel armor plate, rose like gigantic fingertips toward the night sky. The smell of salt water hung over everything; the harbor lay at the opposite end of the yard. Huge piles of steel were neatly stacked near a one-story building that gave forth a dull glow.

"We roll our own steel," Sunderland explained. "The government insists that we do this so the secret composition of the armor plate won't become known. That's what I'm worried about—somebody is either trying to get the secret or—doing something to the steel. That small supply shed over there—near the base of that big crane—that's what I want watched."

"You stay here," Dolan advised. "I'll slip around and cover the back. You can tell me later just what's up your sleeve."

Dolan crouched, and blended with the darkness. He reached a point about thirty feet from where Sunderland was hidden, and found that he could keep all but one side of the supply shed under close observation. Minutes went by, and Dolan became impatient. He was on the verge of crawling back to Sunderland's side and getting the entire low-down when one of the big derrick motors roared into life. There was a scuffling sound toward Dolan's right. He looked that way and saw nothing. He jumped to his feet. That derrick motor hadn't been started just to make noise. He ran toward it, but as he swept around a corner of one big rolling mill, he looked up—and his blood turned icy cold.

The derrick was used to lift heavy plates of steel. A strong cable hung from its high beam—and now a weird object hung from the cable, too. The body of a man! It was spinning crazily, and was outlined against the sky almost as vividly as black against white. Dolan reached the small shack where the derrick's mechanism was housed. He burst through the door and looked around. No one moved. The tiny place was empty. Dolan grabbed the controls, started the motor again and brought that hideous, dangling object back to the ground. He heard the guards posted outside the yards, yelling to one another. Flashlights were cutting swaths through the darkness as others approached. Dolan paid no attention to them. He ran a zigzag course around piles of steel and small workshops until he reached the corpse that lay sprawled on the ground. He found that a rope had been noosed around the man's throat and the other end of it tied to the derrick cable. He turned the victim over, and confirmation of what he suspected, was horribly depicted before his eyes.

Scott Sunderland, chief chemist for the shipyards, would never tell Dolan what he really suspected. Sunderland was dead, his neck broken.

CHAPTER II.

THE KILLER WORKS IN DARKNESS.

"Don't move!" a harsh voice warned. "You're covered."

Dolan stood up and raised his hands. Four uniformed guards had rifles pointed his way. The slender man in a lieutenant's uniform stepped closer, his automatic ready.

"Put your guns away," Dolan growled. "That's Sunderland, you see. He's dead. Somebody rapped him on the head, put a noose around

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his neck and hung him from the derrick. My name is Dynamite Dolan. I'm trouble shooter for National Industries, and I've a right to be here."

"Sunderland!" the guard lieutenant dropped to one knee and made a quick examination. When he arose, his face was grim. "Until I verify your identity, Mr. Dolan, you're under arrest."

"Don't be a fool," Dolan grunted. "I've got identification in my pocket. Take a look at it."

The lieutenant did, and was satisfied. "Sorry, sir. I'm Braddock, in charge of the night guards. I work for the Darwell Protective Agency. Darwell is on his way down now. I phoned him when that derrick motor started going."

Dolan was barely listening to Braddock. He searched Sunderland carefully, but the only significant thing he found was a drill—a small steel drill that had been tucked away in Sunderland's inner pocket. He wrapped this up carefully in his handkerchief and then gave crisp orders.

"Take me to Sunderland's lab. Two of your men are to remain with the body. Keep an eye out for prowlers. The killers must be still inside the yard."

As Braddock and Dolan headed for a three-story, white-painted building where the chemical laboratory was housed, headlights streamed across the spacious yard and a sedan rolled to a stop. A man in civilian clothes climbed out. Braddock saluted respectfully.

"Sunderland has been murdered, sir. This man is Dynamite Dolan of National Industries. We're going to Sunderland's lab."

"I'm Darwell, in charge of protecting this yard," the newcomer said. "Why are you going to the lab?"

"Because Sunderland suspected something was ready to break tonight," Dolan explained. "He thought there was a plot afoot to sabotage the building of the destroyers—or to impair them. He was a chemist, and any suspicions he had must have been partly discovered in his lab work."

Braddock had keys, and opened the building. They went into an extensive, very well equipped laboratory. Dolan headed toward the bench on which was arranged apparatus set up for analysis work. Braddock and Darwell were somewhere behind him.

As Dolan reached for a small black notebook in which Sunderland had apparently been taking notes, the lights went out. Braddock gave a wild yell and fired two shots in the direction of the door. Darwell ducked, and Dolan eased toward a thick, square pillar in the middle of the room. Something whizzed through the air just above his head and stopped with a violent snapping sound. Then it came again. This time, something that felt like the coils of a boa constrictor wound around Dolan's legs. He tripped and fell. Instantly, a dark form landed on top of him. An object came down in a murderous blow aimed at his skull. He rolled his head slightly, and the blow only glanced off his temple. Yet it stunned him momentarily. When he finally regained his senses, he heard Braddock and Darwell shouting for help.

"Got him!" Braddock suddenly howled. Then there was a thud, the sound of a body falling to the floor and utter silence.

"Darwell!" Dolan whispered hoarsely. "You all right?"

An affirmative grunt answered. Dolan was sitting up and uncoiling

thin, flexible wire cord from around his ankles. His legs free, he stood up, blinked dizzily for a second and then made a plunge across the room straight toward the door. He reached it, barely avoiding a bad fall from stumbling over a form stretched full length on the floor. He fumbled for the switch, found it and flooded the room with light. Darwell was crouched in the center of the room, drawn gun in his fist and a smear of blood alongside his cheek. Braddock was unconscious on the floor.

Dolan examined him briefly, saw that he had taken a terrific blow across the temple, but was already beginning to come out of it. Then Dolan rushed over to the laboratory bench. The black notebook was gone and the apparatus smashed into slivers. He thought of the small drill which Sunderland had carried. Dolan's hand darted toward his pocket and he emitted a groan. The drill was gone!

Dolan sat down and smiled wryly. "Boy! Whoever tackled us sure was a whirlwind, and he seems to have got what he came for too. Let's help Braddock up."

Braddock sipped a glass of water gratefully. "I don't know what happened. The lights went out, and I heard somebody fall. There's only one door to this room, so I figured if I covered that I'd nail whoever was in here. Instead, he nailed me —and how! Never had a glimpse of him in this damned darkness."

"Nor did I," Darwell groaned. "I grabbed at his coat tails, but he slugged me and got away. But he can't get far. A fly couldn't get over the walls of this yard, nor through any of the gates. The men were warned to be on the alert."

Braddock lit a cigarette from a match that Dolan held for him. His fingers were stained yellow, apparently by tobacco tar, and he seemed to need the cigarette more than the drink of water.

"What's the next move?" he asked. "Personally, I think we ought to call the police."

Dolan faced the two men. "Before that happens, we must realize that the missing notebook may not have left this room. I'm not accusing you any more than you would accuse me, but I suggest we search one another just to be positive."

They spent five minutes doing that. Dolan wandered over to a window. "Now we can call the cops, and incidentally, trust one another. We'll get a squad of police here and go over the whole shipyard. If your man don't slip by your guards, there's only one possible way he could have escaped—into the water of the harbor. I—wait a minute—stay just as you are. Some one is prowling around that shed which Sunderland and I were watching. Braddock—let's have your gun."

Dolan darted out of the room, ran down the two flights of stairs and into the yard. He ducked behind one long rolling shed, made his way closer to the building and saw his man again. He was just coming out, and he acted like a man who didn't want to be seen.

"Just stop where you are," Dolan called out. "If you don't, you'll know what it feels like to be shot."

The man obeyed and stretched both hands high. Dolan stepped up to him, put the muzzle of his gun against the man's side and grabbed his wrist. He searched him deftly, found no weapon and then dragged him back to the laboratory. In the light of the hallway he had a good look at him. He was no more than

twenty-two or three and he wore thick-lensed glasses. His face was thin and very frightened looking. The wrist to which Dolan clung shook badly.

"What a specimen!" Dolan grunted. O. K.—up those stairs."

Braddock jumped up when Dolan and his prisoner entered. "Tobin," he frowned. "What the devil—"

"So you know the rat," Dolan growled. "That makes it easier. This little pup sneaked into the supply shed. Maybe he'll tell us why, eh?"

Tobin licked his lips, tried to talk and only succeeded in making funny, shrill noises. Braddock moved forward.

"That's Tobin," he explained. "He is Sunderland's assistant chemist. I don't know what he's doing around here this time of night."

"I . . . I—" Tobin found his tongue. "I came here because I think something funny is going on. Sunderland just as much as told me so this afternoon. I . . . I know he's dead now, and I . . . I wanted to finish what he was trying to prove."

"Which was exactly what?" Dolan broke in.

"I'm not certain. I . . . I have to do some work here first. It's—about the armor plate. There's somthing wrong. Look—give me an hour. Just one hour in this lab, and I'll know for sure."

Dolan sat down. "Get to work, Tobin, but I'm staying right here, too. Darwell, I suggest that you and Braddock supervise a search of the yards. Concentrate on the docks, look for anybody hiding in the water. We'll phone the police just

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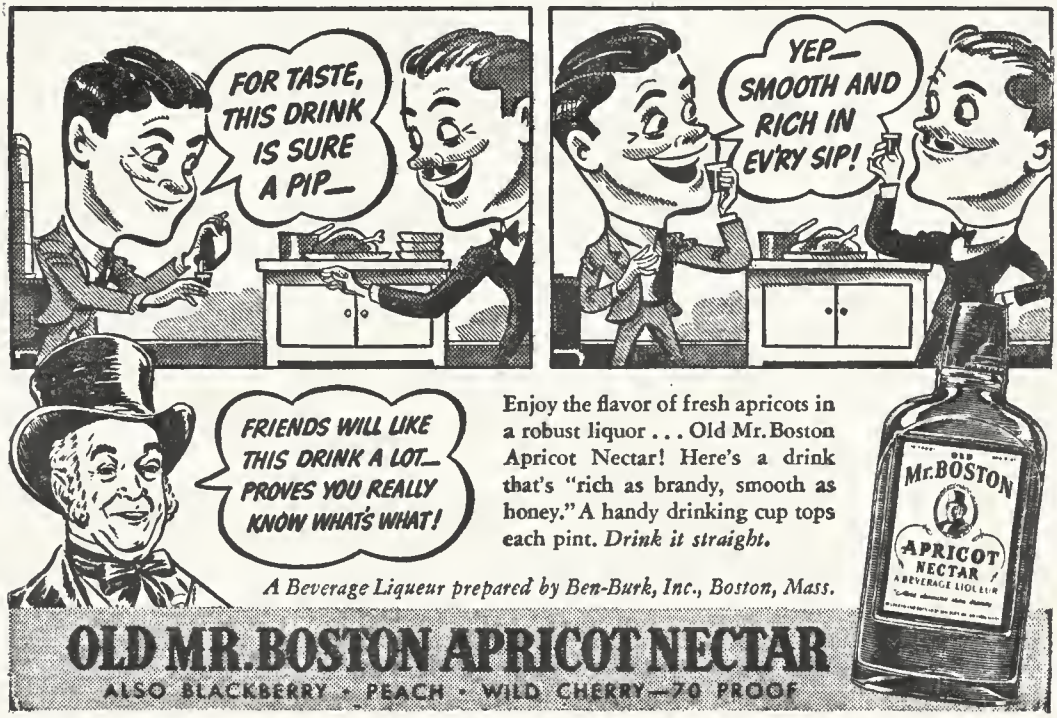
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as soon as Tobin finishes."

Darwell and Braddock hurried out. Tobin hastily arranged test tubes and beakers. He poured acid into them, took a folded piece of paper from his pocket and spilled the contents into the acid. It bubbled and began to smoke. Tobin stirred it, and talked without removing his eyes from the liquid.

"Just like Sunderland thought, it's my idea that somebody is changing metals or putting inferior stuff into the steel used for the armor plate on the destroyers. We got wise this afternoon when a riveter was pounding a hot rivet through one section of armor plate. The steel seemed to crack on the surface. Sunderland took a sample, but I don't know what he found."

Tobin bustled around, diluting his solutions and holding test tubes up to the light. Dolan watched him narrowly. Tobin might have been faking. It was possible that he could have been the man who slipped into the lab, wrapped a coil of wire around Dolan's legs, knocked Braddock unconscious and then fled. And knowing he was trapped inside the yard, he could have deliberately exposed himself to put over this trumped-up business.

Dolan was trying to puzzle that and other things out when a single shot roared in the darkness below. He raced toward the window. Braddock was just below it.

"Saw him!" he shouted. "He's heading for the docks!"

Dolan sped toward the door, hesitated a moment and wondered if he could dare risk leaving Tobin alone. The young chemist didn't even seem to have noticed the shot nor Dolan's excitement. He was deep in the midst of his work. Dolan decided to take a chance. If Braddock saw the killer, certainly he wouldn't try to double back and risk his own skin merely to silence Tobin. Just to be sure, Dolan locked the young chemist in and took the key.

Braddock was running toward the water front. Several guards were spread out to encompass the fleeing man in a net from which escape was impossible. Dolan cut across the yard. Suddenly he slowed up. The roar of a derrick motor filled the night again. He looked up. The cable was being drawn higher and higher, and from its end hung a small, thin figure, spinning like a top.

CHAPTER III.

THE NOOSE.

Braddock stopped and yelled. Dolan was already sprinting toward the derrick house. As with the first murder, no one was around. Dolan lowered the corpse almost into Braddock's arms. When he reached the lieutenant of guards, Braddock was just rising from a kneeling position.

"It's Tobin," Braddock said curtly. "Why the devil didn't you stay with him?"

Dolan slid a hand beneath the prone man's shirt. There was no heartbeat. He saw the twisted neck and knew that Tobin hadn't lived but a few seconds after the noose encompassed his throat. As he removed his hand, something scratched him. Dolan fumbled and drew out another of those small steel drills. This time he palmed it and said nothing of his find.

"How," Braddock wanted to know, "did they ever get him? How could they lure him out of the lab, put a noose around his neck and hang him so damned quickly?"

Dolan was looking at the three-storied laboratory building. "My hunch is that there are two or three

killers loose around here. Yet I locked Tobin in. I want every man ready for inspection. Divide them into groups, so each exit will still be covered. Our killer is getting help somehow, and I'm going to find out who is doing it. Here comes Darwell—he certainly kept out of sight. I'll take him and check the contents of that supply shed—which Sunderland and Tobin both visited just before they died. The secret to all this must lie there."

Darwell explained that he had posted men to cover the water front. He groaned dismally when he heard of the second murder. All this meant no good to him or his private detective agency. He and Dolan entered the supply shed, turned on the lights and saw that it was stacked high with ingots of various kinds of metal.

"Sure," Darwell explained, "they use a lot of different rare metals to make the steel hard and shellproof. Stuff in here is worth plenty—half a million, I'll bet. They should have a safe for it, but I suppose they figure I've got men enough to guard it. I'm beginning to wonder. What's your next move, Dolan? Mine is to

One of the men grabbed Dolan by the hair, lifted his head—and the other draped the noose around his throat!

hunt up half a dozen aspirin tablets."

Dolan was busy examining each pile of ingots. "I'm going to do some outside checking until daylight. Then I'll be back to watch the crews go to work. If this is sabotage, most of it will be done by men working around the yard. Get me out of the gate, will you, Darwell? And question all your men."

Dolan was passed through, and he walked briskly up the street. He hailed a cab, ordered the driver to enter the winding road through a big public park and slipped him a bill with orders to keep on going for another hour. Then, as the taxi slowed to make a sharp turn, Dolan opened the door, stepped onto the running board and after he closed the door again, he jumped. He landed lightly, rolled over a few times and watched the road from behind a bush. Two minutes after he jumped, another car rolled through the park, without headlights. There were at least four men in it.

Dolan grinned cheerfully, began running across the grassy expanse of ground and came out on a quiet street. He took another cab, rode back in the direction of the shipyards and dismissed the taxi a dozen blocks away. Then he headed straight for the water front, removed his coat, vest and shoes. He cleaned out the pockets of his trousers and rolled everything into a compact wad, which he secreted. Then he looked around for a moment, slipped into the water and began swimming toward the shipyards.

As he neared the great docks on which the destroyers were being built, he swam under water as long as he could. There were guards posted everywhere, and what Dolan had to do must not be interfered with. He clung to a piling for a moment, while he rested. Then he slipped up on land, avoided two rifle-armed guards who kept staring out over the bay, and made his way straight back to the three-story building which housed the chemical laboratory.

He ran up the stairs lightly, extracted the door key from his trousers pocket and went in. The lights were still turned on, and he avoided the windows carefully. He crouched beneath the bench on which Tobin had begun his work. Dolan quietly appropriated several test tubes, corked them and wrapped them in a piece of cloth. He stuffed this into his pocket, crawled over to the open window and examined it critically without exposing himself. He knew now exactly how Tobin had vanished out of that room and been suspended from the end of the derrick cable. Somehow they had attracted his attention. He'd looked out the window, and a killer on the roof had been prepared with a noose. Once it dropped around Tobin's throat, the derrick pulled it tight, dragged Tabin out of the window and hung him high into space. Dolan shivered. It wasn't a pleasant way to die.

Half an hour later, he was back at the point where he had hidden his clothes. He put them on, made sure the test tubes were in order, and then rushed straight to police headquarters. It was almost dawn as he paced the floor of the police lab while two chemists worked on the contents of those test tubes.

"If this steel is being used to armor-plate battleships," one told Dolan, "I feel sorry for the men aboard her if a battle starts. That steel lacks molybdenum, which makes it hard and resistant to shell fire. The necessary percentage has

been cut by two-thirds."

Dolan took out the small drill which he had removed from Tobin's body. "This drill was used by chemists to take samples from certain metal ingots. A very little bit of the metal is still clinging to the drill. Can you tell me what it is?"

They could and did—quickly. "It's an alloy of molybdenum and plain iron. Cheap alloy, although it contains a lot more molybdenum than the test solutions you brought."

"Good," Dolan said. "Mark the stuff for evidence, and put it all in the safe. Somebody might like to lay their hands on it."

He left police headquarters and headed in the direction of the shipyards. The streets were deserted, except for a milk truck or two. There wasn't a taxi in sight. Dolan ambled on, puzzling out the details. He knew why two chemists had been murdered. He was pretty sure he knew who had caused these killings to be done, but he couldn't figure out the motive. Sabotage? Perhaps, but then it was pretty poor stuff, for the lack of molybdenum in the armor steel was bound to be noticed. Of course, it would take half a million dollars or more to re-armor each destroyer, and certainly

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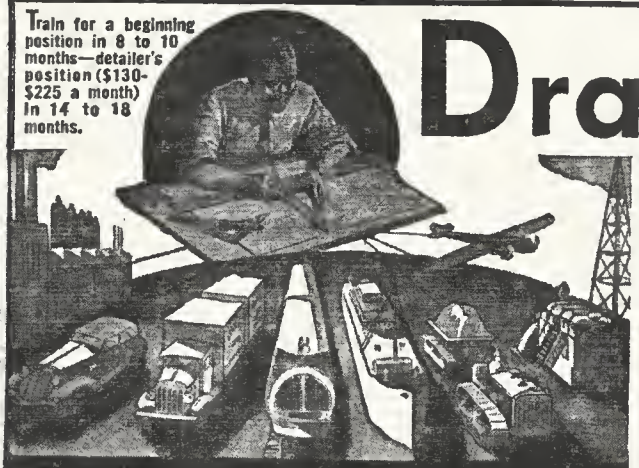

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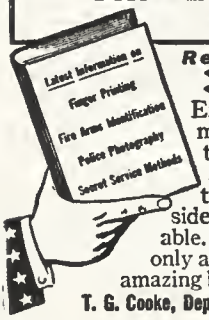

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delay their final approval. But what then? No nation was ready to go to war with the United States. Simple delay wouldn't help anyone. There was something else.

His mind deep in these problems, Dolan stepped off the curb, walked across a narrow street that was hardly more than an alley, and heard the sound of approaching trouble just too late. Three men came out of the darkness, and their method of attack had been well planned in advance. One made a dive for Dolan's legs. Another leaped on his shoulders, while the third ran around him and began jabbing the butt of a gun across Dolan's face.

The big trouble shooter managed to shake off the man on his shoulders and to send the one who kept jabbing a gun into his face, rolling in a clumsy somersault into the gutter; but the man who clung to his legs gave a violent tug, and Dolan pitched forward. He hit the sidewalk so hard that it knocked the breath out of him. He struggled to get up again, but now all three of the men jumped on him. Three guns were clubbed, and they beat savagely against Dolan's skull. He dimly heard the sound of a car as it rolled up the narrow street.

He was being dragged out of the car when he opened his eyes again. He tried to move, but his ankles and wrists were held together with strong wire. Not even his mighty strength could break those bonds. Two men seized his legs and pulled him across an old, rickety dock. There was a fast-moving speedboat waiting, and they dumped him into it. The moment he landed, two men put guns against his ribs and held them there while the craft was poled away from the dock. The motor started with a roar, and spray began to settled down on Dolan's upturned face.

"Big bozo, ain't he?" one of the two gunmen said.

"Yeah," the other snapped. "Pretty soon he'll be a big stiff—and I'm not kidding, either. It's lucky the boss noticed Dolan and swiped that stuff from the lab and guessed the only place he could get it analyzed in a hurry was at the cop's."

Dolan kept his eyes closed, fighting to get back his strength. He was slated for death without question, but Dolan wouldn't worry until the actual killing began. He'd been in tight spots before.

The launch motor sputtered and died. Two men seized long poles and began shoving the craft toward shore. They were headed straight for the big drydocks on which the destroyers were being built. A narrow channel had been dredged out somehow, which enabled the boat to slide completely under the big construction docks. None of the guards posted near the harbor gave any indication that they had heard the approach of the craft.

"Gag him," one of the men suggested, and Dolan lay quiet while they wadded a chunk of dirty rag into his mouth and fastened it there with a strip of cloth. He was picked up, dumped out of the boat and into slimy, thick mud which incased his arms and legs. Someone approached and gave whispered orders. That same man stepped up to where Dolan lay and kicked him in the ribs, chuckled softly, and then padded away across the mud. Three men picked Dolan up bodily, and with an assortment of protesting grunts at his weight, they stumbled across the shipyards until they reached one of the supply sheds.

As he hit the ground, Dolan took a quick look and his blood froze in horror. The tall, slender beam of a derrick was directly overhead, and its cable threaded through the night until the hook at its end lay within two feet of Dolan.

The men were busy fashioning a noose. They slapped Dolan's face to awaken him, and laughed when he tried to get free of his bonds.

"In two minutes, wise guy," one man said, "you'll begin a little trip 'way up into the air. You'll get a swell view, too—if you're not too busy to enjoy it. Some guys say that when you hang, you ain't interested in scenery much. So long, Dolan, and it's too bad you ain't got some of that dynamite they named you after."

One of the men grabbed Dolan by the hair, lifted his head, and the other draped the noose around his throat. Then they were gone. Dolan didn't hesitate a fraction of

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a second. He hunched his body like an inchworm and reached the big hook to which the other end of the rope had been tied. He rolled over until his wrists touched the cold steel. At any second they'd start the mechanism of that damned derrick and he'd be lifted high into the air—by the neck!

CHAPTER IV.
TRAITORS IN UNIFORM.

The hook was narrow, but very strong. Dolan began forcing its point between his wrists so that he'd hang by his wrists and not his throat. Then he heard the derrick start. The hook began moving across the ground. Dolan felt himself hoisted by a mighty force of leverage and electricity. He went up and up, but that noose around his throat didn't tighten, because Dolan's wrists were linked around the hook. He was high enough to hear the pulleys squeal, and he hoped that anyone below wouldn't be able to notice that he wasn't spinning at the end of the rope.

His wrists were still wet with the mud they'd dropped him into, and his own weight was making the wire around his wrists begin to slip a little. He knew that some of his own blood was mixed with the mud, for the wire was cutting painfully. He ground his teeth together. When he pulled those bonds free, he'd drop —about ten feet—and then the noose would begin its work. The only way to avoid that was by catching the rope before he came free of the hook. His fingers grasped the rope just in time. The wire slipped off his wrists, and he dropped—but only a foot or two. He began to spin crazily, but he hung on and closed his eyes to prevent dizziness from reaching a maximum point. When the spinning ceased, he carefully wound the rope around one lacerated wrist and began climbing it hand over hand. When there was sufficient slack, he eased the noose from around his neck. He reached the top of the derrick, grasped at the narrow girders of which it was manufactured, and finally hoisted himself up until he lay across it, breathing hard and trying to stop a wave of nausea that crept up on him.

It required a full five minutes before he dared to risk the dangerous descent. He peered through the gloom of early morning. No guards seemed to have responded to the sound of the derrick's motor. He did see an elderly man saunter across the yard and enter the control room of another derrick. Then Dolan clambered down the slanted arm of the derrick until he was able to drop off and sink to the ground. The bodies of Tobin and Sunderland had been removed long before, but the police knew Dolan and were giving him a free hand for the time being.

Dolan wondered how long it would be before the killers looked up and noticed that no corpse dangled from the edge of the derrick. Once that happened, he'd be in extreme danger again. They couldn't afford to permit him to live now.

He heard two of Darwell's uniformed guards approaching, and he ducked hastily behind the corner of a building. Both men strolled into view, and both held automatic rifles. One of them talked in a low voice, and then he glanced over toward the derrick.

He gave a hoarse shout, and Dolan didn't wait any longer. He came around the corner of that building like an infuriated elephant. Before either man could raise a gun, Dolan

was upon them. His right fist cracked one guard squarely on the chin, lifted him off the ground and hurled him a dozen feet away. The other tried to use his rifle as a club when Dolan was too close for shooting. Dolan ducked the blow, darted up very close to the guard and fastened both hands around his throat, choking off the warning cry that the guard started to bellow. He held him in this grip until the man went limp. Dolan hastily disarmed both men, hurled one of the guns beneath a building that was built on stilts, and cradled the second rifle in his arm. He began running.

From somewhere in the harbor, the roar of an airplane motor seemed to grow louder and louder. Dolan had a glimpse of a sleek amphibian just settling down on the water as gracefully as a bird. She began taxiing closer to the docks.

He darted inside the derrick house, gun at his hip. The old man who had reported for work so early stared at Dolan as if he were a man from the grave. Dolan had an idea maybe he did look like a resurrected corpse, with the mud and blood all over him. Then sudden recognition grew in the old man's eyes.

"Dolan! Dynamite Dolan!"

"Casey!" Dolan cried. "What a break! No time to explain. I'm going to need your help. This derrick can extend far out over the water. She's all set, with a steel armor-plate section ready to be lifted. When I give the word, lift her. I'll be on top, so handle her easy. Watch my signals."

Dolan darted outside once more. A shot welcomed him. One of the brown-uniformed guards was on his knees to aim better. Dolan's automatic rifle spurted one burst and the guard fell forward on his face. Most of the guards were concentrated near the dock. Probably half of them were lined up belligerently, all with

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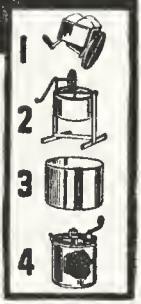

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guns ready. Others were busy handing down what seemed to be very heavy articles. Dolan knew their destination. First into the fast motor launch which would dart out to the amphibian. A quick transfer, a take-off, and that would be all. Before any help came, the treacherous guards would be out of uniform and spread to the four corners of the city.

Dolan sprang straight toward the massive slab of armor plate that rested on a big platform. He grabbed the drag chains, waved his hand and Casey started the derrick. It lifted Dolan straight up and then, in response to his signals, sent him out over the harbor. From below, the guards suddenly realized what was happening. They raised their guns and began firing. Dolan dropped flat on that swaying slab of metal, heard scores of bullets glance off the steei plate and grinned. He couldn't have asked for better protection.

The motor launch was moving out of its secret slip. There were, perhaps, four men in it, and they were crouched behind a huge stack of something covered with tarpaulin. As Dolan swung out above them, they began shooting. At the same time the amphibian started to move in. Dolan wriggled closer to the edge, pointed his submachine gun downward and yanked the trigger. Two of the men on the launch slumped in response to his first burst. One of the others gave way to a case of nerves and jumped into the water. The fourth tried desperately to steer the launch farther out so Dolan would no longer have her in direct range. Another burst from his rifle. A column of smoke arose from the bow of the launch. Her motor was on fire.

But the amphibian was closing in, and she carried a heavy machine gun. These big chunks of lead hammered

against the under part of the steel slapping with the force of a rivet gun. Each jolt shot through Dolan's body almost as painfully as a bullet.

He lay on his side to brace himself better against the fusillade, rested the muzzle of his gun against the edge of the slab, and sighted it. He drew a bead on the gunner in that plane, pulled trigger—and the firing stopped abruptly. Now the amphibian concentrated on getting away from this maniac atop the steel plate, who could shoot like a demon and at the same time protect himself as well as a soldier in the Maginot Line. The plane turned awkwardly, started to gain speed, and then Dolan's rifle got busy once more. He swept that plane from stem to stern. She nosed up out of the water and then dropped back, like a pancake. Police boats and a coast-guard patrol came streaking in from the high seas.

Dolan knelt on the armor plate, maintaining his balance by clinging to the cables. He looked behind him. Squads of police were running through the yard. From one of the sheds, uniformed guards poured out with guns in their hands. The others, near the docks, started to split and run for it individually. Dolan waved his hand, and Casey got the signal. He sent the derrick sweeping directly above them, lowered Dolan several yards and then stopped the machinery. Dolan fired a burst, making a circle out of the hurtling pelter of bullets. The treacherous guards were trapped. They gathered into one group, afraid to run for it, afraid to make a standing fight.

"Drop your guns!" Dolan yelled. "Drop 'em—or I'll put a burst through every one of you."

The guns dropped and hands shot erect. Police and other plant guards closed in. Casey began lowering Dolan. When he stepped off the steel armor plate, Lieutenant Braddock and Darwell were both there to meet him.

"I don't know what happened," Darwell was breathing hard, "but you certainly stopped those men in their tracks. They are not my employees, even though the uniforms are exactly like those I furnish. Dolan—what happened? What were they up to?"

Dolan massaged his swollen, lacerated wrists while he talked. "Those

rats are plain, ordinary crooks—mugs from the city. They were hired to help steal a few hundred thousand dollars worth of molybdenum. They got it gradually, by switching inferior grades of the metal for the high-test stuff. Sunderland and Tobin, as chemists, made routine tests and got suspicious. They slipped into the molybdenum supply shed and drilled sample shavings out of certain ingots. Before they really tested the stuff, they were killed. But I finished testing what Tobin had begun. I also found a small drill on Tobin and pieces of metal adhered to it. These showed identical results by analysis. The ingots being used to harden the armor plate were three quarters plain iron. The real one-hundred-percent ingots were hidden below the docks. They were stowed aboard a launch which was to meet the plane in the harbor. After a transfer of the stuff, the plane would take off and keep a rendezvous with some alien ship far out at sea. Certain countries would pay a fortune for that metal."

Lieutenant Braddock stepped closer. "I don't know who heads the outfit, but he must be clever. I called a meeting of guards in one of the sheds. Somebody locked us in. Then the shooting started."

"You do any of it?" Dolan asked gently. "Let's see your gun."

Braddock looked puzzled, but he handed over the weapon. Dolan merely glanced at it.

"The man who headed the outfit was certainly clever. Smart enough to lay the groundwork months in advance. You, Braddock, built yourself up in Darwell's organization of private guards. You hired some of your own crooks to operate inside the yard, assigned guards you couldn't trust to outside jobs. It worked nicely, until Sunderland got wise and phoned me. One of your men was on the switchboard, overheard the conversation and set a trap for both Sunderland and myself. It didn't quite catch us. Then you killed Sunderland by hanging him from a derrick. It was a spectacular method, but it provided a neat alibi for you because whenever the bodies were whisked into the air, you made sure you were outside the gates and in the presence of guards you could trust."

Braddock looked at the circle of police around him, faced Dolan and rapped out an oath. "Of all the silly nonsense—"

"Stop kidding," Dolan growled. "You put the lights out in the lab

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so you could get your hands on the black notebook and destroy the test solutions which Sunderland had prepared. You took the drill from my pocket after knocking me down. You passed it to a pal, let him slug you, and fixed another alibi. But you made a couple of mistakes. When you started shooting at the imaginary intruder, you were crouched behind the laboratory bench just below the spot where the apparatus was set up. You smashed the apparatus with your pistol butt, but you forgot that it takes powerful acid to dissolve steel or molybdenum. The acid spattered all over the butt of your gun and some of it got on your hands. I noticed the yellow stains when I lit your cigarette. I also borrowed your gun when I went after Tobin. I felt the rough spots where the acid had eaten. That's why the police and coast guard were ready. I warned them. Don't tell me I'm wrong, because right now I'm having trouble in holding back a swell punch on the nose. Spies are low-down creatures, but men who betray their own country for money are worse. Take him away before I knock his head off."

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BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Continued from page 6

good material for exciting stories, this one is better than most of them, and therefore excellent material for an interesting and exciting time.

"The Corpse Hangs High," by Norman A. Daniels, is a real thriller that will give you goose pimples from time to time as you go through it. And another thing—it's one of these stories that you'll not guess the ending. Perhaps you'll be lucky enough to work it out; then again, you may have to wait until it's all revealed.

In our next issue, we will give you a new Carrie Cashin story by Theodore Tinsley. You readers have liked these stories a great deal, and your preference is vindicated by the fact that Carrie has been taken for use in comic magazines as exciting adventure, and is also being used in television at the present time. Of course, since there are no commercial television broadcasts, you'll have no occasion to see her in action on your radio screen (or whatever television sets will be known as!) but the chances are that, when television does go commercial, you'll see Carrie right up front, giving the public good, exciting episodes.

Other yarns in the next issue will include novelettes by Alan Hathway, Jack Storm, and others, all selected with the purpose of giving you the best possible entertainment.

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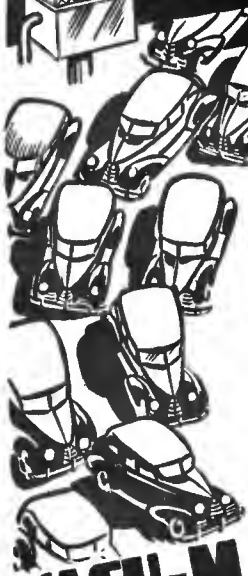

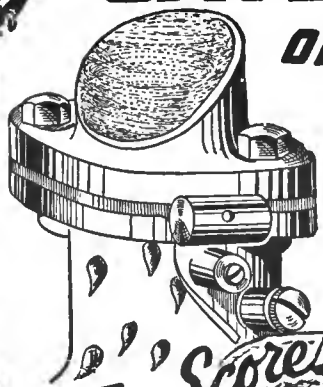

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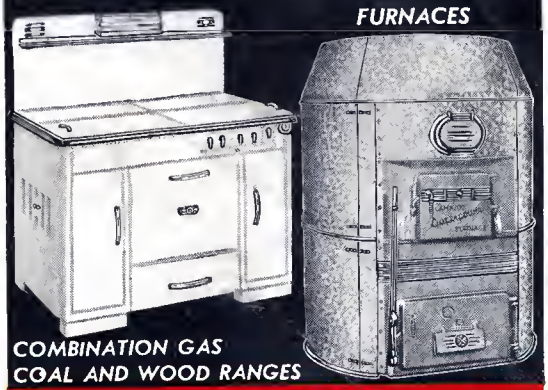

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